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EARLY CINEMA

AN INTRODUCTION BY ROD STONEMAN



¹ See Paul Kerr, 'Re-Inventing the Cinema', *Screen* vol 21 no 4, pp 80-84. This event, organised by South West Arts, centred on films from 1895-1911, and is to be followed by another covering the period 1906-1915 planned for the East Midlands this autumn.

² *Theory of Film Practice* (trans Helen Lane), London, Secker Martin & Warburg, is the English version of a series of articles first published by *Cahiers du Cinema* in 1967.

³ *Screen*, Autumn 1976, vol 17 no 3, pp 5-6.

At a conference on 'Inventing the Cinema' held at Dartington in 1980¹, a debate was conducted between Noël Burch and Ben Brewster on the operation of narrative in early cinema. The two pieces which follow are amplifications of that discussion, centring on the question of how cinema constructs a position of knowledge and involvement for the spectator – a construction developed both historically and formally.

Ben Brewster considers the formation of cinema as an institution, particularly the way in which narrative is organised through looks – between characters on the screen and the spectator to the screen. Several early films are examined in terms of the way in which patterns of relative knowledge are built up; these 'hierarchies of perception' also involve a dual focus on relations between characters on the screen and the spectator to the screen.

Conversely, Noël Burch's wide-ranging analysis of the gradual stabilization of filmic language asserts that strong diegetic effects are not dependent upon narrative as such (the linear causal relations between elements). His approach stresses the illusionistic production of an on-screen world as the basis of spectator involvement against the temporal narrative structures examined by Brewster. Thus Burch's interest in *non-moving* pictures, from pre-cinema magic lanterns to Snow's slide show, *A Casing Shelved*.

'Narrative/Diegesis' should be seen in relation to Burch's previous work; his separation of filmic components in *Theory of Film Practice* (together with a demand for their articulation on the basis of principles derived from serial music) was much criticised for a textually-based formalism when the English version² appeared in 1973. Now, through an understanding of the historical provenance and institutional determinations, Burch attempts to examine the chronological development of these formal components and sketch in their (hierarchical) relation to one another.

The movement between different levels of argument within his article is notable, particularly the shift towards the end from the closely argued description of the origins of a signifying system to provocative assertions about American television today – the fragmentation and disarticulation of its devices enforcing spectator passivity. Burch's contentions map out a productive area for debate which echoes Brewster's warnings in a 1976 *Screen* editorial³ against the tendency to simply connect certain formal strategies, such as foregrounding and fragmentation, with radical effects. This debate has important implications for

oppositional work both inside and outside the institutions of broadcasting; Burch's own essay-film on early cinema, *Correction Please, or How We Got into Pictures*, is particularly relevant here.

These two articles are evidence of the recent growth of interest in early cinema, not as an antiquarian or cultist concern, but for its potential use in a number of different contexts: it offers a uniquely productive perspective on the forms and institutions of cinema as they operate today, and it is relevant both to critical, analytical work and to contemporary film practices (both within and without the institutions of cinema and television).

The complex imbrication between earlier forms and current counter-practices is evidenced by Burch's reference to the films of independent film-makers such as Michael Snow and Margaret Tait in his analysis of the construction of the diegetic process in mainstream narrative films. That the profusion of non-naturalistic forms in 'primitive' films continues to provoke interest in independent film-making⁴ is shown by this spring's season of early and avant-garde films at the London Film-makers' Co-op and by references to primitive modes in films such as Mich Eaton's *Description of the World* (1981). The basis for the cross-relation is confirmed by revelations such as George Rey's *La Vache qui Rumine* (1970)—a brilliantly simple one-reeler of a cow chewing its cud—and the recent discovery of Marcel Fabre's incredible *Amor Pedestre* (1914)—a metonymic narrative of a romance enacted entirely in close-ups of feet. Given the extremely limited access to early film (most holdings are purely archival) it is only at occasional cultural events and conferences that the initial empirical work necessary for these debates is usually conducted. Yet the enthusiastic response to a wealth of diverse 'new' material shown at 'Il Cinema Italiano Muto 1907-1921', held in Ancona in 1980, indicates the scope and urgency of this rediscovery.

The contradictory factors at play in the dynamic context of the early years of cinema make it a central site for the project, mapped out by Walter Benjamin in his essay on the industrialisation of the image⁵, of specifying the historical circumstances which determine the 'manner in which human sense perception is organised and the medium in which it is accomplished'. However, unless the remaking of our understanding of the past is related to issues of the present, it risks becoming simply marginal or residual. Early film poses particularly clearly the way in which the historical explanation of particular representational systems is an integral part of the process of their evolution and modification.

⁴ See *Afterimage*, no 8-9.

⁵ 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations*, London, Fontana, 1973.

A SCENE AT THE 'MOVIES'

BEN BREWSTER TRACES THE
DEVELOPMENT OF NARRATIVE
PERSPECTIVE IN EARLY CINEMA



She stole noiselessly down the broad staircase . . . and noiselessly approached the door of the big room where she had left her father. . . . Nobody saw her, nobody heard her, and she had a moment to gaze unobserved at the scene before her. It was like a scene at the 'movies', with all those books, and the piano, and the comfortable chairs, and the big portrait hanging over the fireplace, and the pretty lady behind the steaming tea-kettle, and the dog and the boys. . . . Only it was real! There were real bindings on the books, real reading in them, there was real tea in the teapot. The people were real, and their feelings for each other were real, too. She, standing on the outside, was the only unreal thing in this home scene. She looked at her father. Suddenly the room faded, disappeared, and a close-up of his face dawned on the screen before her, as it were. Why, her father was gazing at the lady behind the tea-kettle, as if—as if!—Laurel had seen too many close-ups of faces not to recognise that look! She drew in her breath sharply. It flashed over Laurel that perhaps this man wasn't really her father after all! She stirred, moved a foot: Mrs Morrison glanced over her shoulder. 'Oh! come here Laurel,' she exclaimed at the sight of her, and stretched out her arm, and kept it stretched out until Laurel had stepped within its circle.¹

IN THIS PASSAGE from a popular novel first published in 1923, the cinema is functioning as a metaphor for a kind of experience, or rather as the vehicle for a kind of phantasy. It is invoked for the segregation of the audience and the screen, the division between a place 'down here' outside, from which one can watch unobserved, and a place 'up there' inside where what one sees is fictional, obviously, and yet seemingly more real than what is down here: Laurel Dallas outside the door is the 'only unreal thing in this home scene'. The segregation involves a reversal of the opposition between reality and illusion, and the projection of the spectator into the scene. And the novel goes on to move Laurel (despite her pangs of conscience: 'How could she—oh how could she have become a part of the picture on the screen, while her mother was still in the audience, out there, in the dark, looking on'²) decisively into the world of Helen Morrison, shifting its point of identification to Laurel's mother Stella Dallas, who abolishes herself as visible to her daughter so as to be able to contemplate her in that world. Near the end, Stella out in the dark streets sees Laurel looking towards her from the lighted window of the Morrisons' house, but 'Laurel didn't know it. Laurel had no idea that her mother's eyes were in the depth of the mirror she had gazed into, at her own reflection'.³ (The scene is faithfully reproduced in the 1925 film version of the novel. The 1937 version, far more uneasy about the phantasy, locates the cinema itself as one of its sources.)

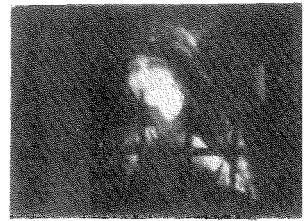
What was the cinema so that by 1923 it could provide such a metaphor? Fifteen years earlier, such a cinema did not exist. It is a specifically English usage that makes the same term the name for the movie-house and for the whole institution of the production, distribution and exhibition of films (*Stella Dallas*, being American, uses 'movies'). But it is appropriate to the institution we know, so appropriate that we read it back into the whole history of the invention and utilization of moving pictures. But the movie house as the apparent centre of moving-picture-related activity only emerges in the decade after 1905; only then is there a hierarchization of the experience of moving pictures into the cinematic (primary) and the non-cinematic (peripheral). Before this decade there is no such division—apparatuses for the reproduction of an illusion of movement are integrated into a whole series of other practices, of science, education, religion, and entertainment. There are a few specialised film-show houses, but films are shown in vaudeville, music-hall or *caf'-conç'* programmes, in fairground booths, in peep shows, in church halls, accompanying popular lectures, and so on. Even as entertainment, they constitute one among a variety of attractions.

After 1905, however, marked most spectacularly by the nickelodeon boom in the USA, specialized houses devoted exclusively or principally to the viewing of films appear and are integrated more and more into a national and international network, containing its own hierarchy of first-, second- and nth-run houses, seat prices, publicity channels, fan magazines, press criticism, etc., which is the cinema we know, the 'movies' Laurel can refer to so casually. Of course, all sorts of other uses of moving pictures continue—blue movies, educational films, films for

¹ Olive Higgins Prouty: *Stella Dallas*, Boston 1923, Paperback Library edition, New York 1967, pp 38-9.

² *ibid*, p 53.

³ *ibid*, p 251.



Above, a sequence from *Stella Dallas*, 1925. Opposite, the cinema itself in the 1937 version.

⁴ Edward Branigan: 'Formal Permutations of the Point-of-View Shot', *Screen* vol 16 no 3, Autumn 1975, pp 54-64.

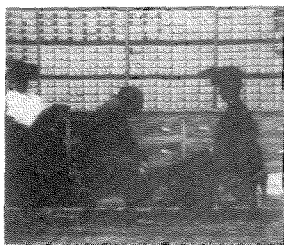
⁵ For a still, see Barry Salt: 'Film Form 1900-06', *Sight and Sound* vol 47 no 3, Summer 1978, p 151.

religious use, scientific films, commercial films; but they are not seen in movie houses (except for a few rare occasions when they obtain the accolade of being real cinema, as with the transfer of some training films for the armed forces into the cinema during the Second World War), so they are not cinema, just a kind of poor relation. Correspondingly, activities inside the movie house are hierarchized under the film – stage interludes, sing-songs, Brenograph displays, in the auditorium; coffee, dinner, even steam baths in the building. And the film is hierarchized – main film, newsreel, travelogue, later A and B feature and high and low genres. In one sense this cinema is just as heterogeneous as the pre-cinematic uses of film were, but the heterogeneity is now held in a more or less peripheral location under the very specialized use of film described by Laurel in the universal form of 'a scene at the "movies"'. And the audiences, too, with all their differences of class, income, education, culture and nationality, consume a single product in a social and geographical hierarchy measured by the interval between release date and their viewing.

But what about the combination of exclusion and projection that characterize that 'scene'? The movies are a form of visual entertainment – pleasure is obtained from what is seen up on the screen. However, for the curious reversal of reality and unreality noted by Laurel, more is required – the articulation of the look from spectator to screen with the looks from character to object and character on the screen. This is the field of what are known as point-of-view structures.

Films had been using point-of-view structures of the type analysed by Edward Branigan⁴ for a long time before *Stella Dallas* was published. In the POV structure we see somebody see, then we see what they see from somewhere approaching their viewpoint (less commonly it is the other way round); vision is marked in the first of these shots, and often in the second, too. The simplest form of this is a type of insert. The scene with insert(s) is probably the earliest form of cutting within the scene; in it, some detail of the scene presented in long shot is shown in a 'magnified view' – not necessarily what would now be called a close-up, but a less inclusive camera set-up than the main scene. In *Falsely Accused* we are given magnified views of bank-notes, a key being pressed into wax, and so on;⁵ in *Mary Jane's Mishap* we have closer shots of the heroine's face. These are taken from the same angle as the main shots, but with a less inclusive view. They do not represent any fictional character's view, they are there for the audience. Even in *The Gay Shoe Clerk*, where what we see in the magnified view (the heroine lifting her skirts for the shoe-clerk to see her underwear) is undoubtedly the object of a look, it is still taken from the side, not from the clerk's own viewpoint.

In the true POV pattern, however, the second shot purports to be (and, more rarely, actually is) photographed from the place where the looking character is fictionally located. In *Grandma's Reading Glass* we see a boy with a magnifying glass looking through it at a newspaper, a watch, a bird in a cage, his grandmother's eye, a kitten, and these shots alternate with magnified views in a black circular mask (representing the glass and



ove, a sequence from *The Gay
ie Clerk*, 1903.

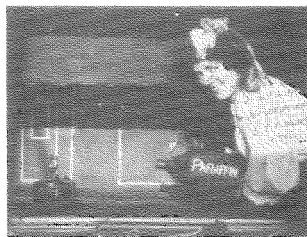
the look) of the print of the newspaper, the watch mechanism, the bird, the eye, the kitten's head. In *The Lady's Ankle* a peeping tom with a telescope spies on a young man tying a girl cyclist's shoe-lace, but the view, much the same as that in *The Gay Shoe Clerk*, is now in a circular mask and represents the peeping tom's point of view.⁶

POV here is, as I say, a special case of the magnified insert. But it would be wrong to see it as a development from the simple insert, leading on to more sophisticated uses of POV in later films. On the contrary, if anything the development is the other way round. In *Grandma's Reading Glass*, the POV structure is the pleasure point of the film, its attraction—to make the break in continuity implicit in a cut within one represented space, the cut has to be made into the end of the film, not its means; in *The Lady's Ankle* (and many other films such as *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième* and *A Search for Evidence*), the structure is serving a simple pornographic narrative, the voyeuristic pleasure in the extra vision still explicitly thematised; in *The Gay Shoe Clerk* the pornographic insert is no longer a strict POV shot; in *Falsely Accused*, conveying straightforward narrative information has become the function of the insert, which function survives as the main role for the insert (and the cut within the same interior space) until the early teens (the other role, more especially in comedies, is the complicit closer shot of a character winking or grinning at the audience, as in *Mary Jane's Mishap* and many others).

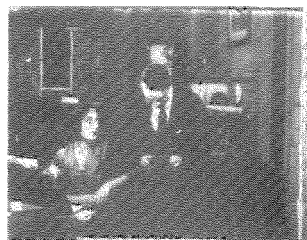
This pattern, from pure spectacle via pornography to simple narrative, is a common one for the introduction of filmic devices, and the association of POV with the first two stages in the introduction of the insert suggests that POV begins as a primitive rather than as a sophisticated use of cutting. Even when a narrative hinges on what a character sees, this will often be conveyed without POV structures, even if a falsification of the diegetic space is implied: in *The Voice of the Child* a character is shown looking down at a picture and there follows a magnified insert of him holding the picture up in front of him to the camera so the audience can see what, in the fiction, he is supposed to be seeing. By this time, of course, spatially more adventurous directors than Griffith were using POV structures where their narratives gave them the opportunity in much the way that later became standard—for example, in *A Friendly Marriage*, where the wife sees her husband and the vicar's daughter apparently lovers. But this 'reintroduction' of POV seems independent of and secondary to another sense of point of view in film narratives much more significant for the experience of segregation and projection described by Laurel Dallas. This is the sense in which changes of viewpoint not necessarily involving true POV make possible hierarchies of relative knowledge for characters and spectators.

A number of early films exploit the change in what can be seen produced by shifting the camera through 180°. In *Ladies' Skirts Nailed to a Fence*, the first shot shows two ladies gossiping by a fence, the second, from the 'other side' of the fence (in fact the film-makers, with what seems now a mis-placed confidence in the Kuleshov effect, use the same camera set up and simply move the characters round to the other side of

⁶ For a still, see Salt, op cit, p 150.



Above, a grin to the audience in *Mary Jane's Mishap*, 1903. Below, a sequence including a magnified insert from *The Voice of the Child*, 1912.





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Above, a sequence from *The Other Side of the Hedge*, 1905. (Poor reproduction due to use of paper print.)



1



2



3

Above, a sequence from *A Friendly Marriage*, 1911.

the fence), shows two young men creep up, pull the ends of their skirts through the fence and nail them to it, and the third, back on the 'original side', shows the ladies struggling to escape. This really hardly differs in its narrative effect from the gardener's turned back in *L'Arroseur arrosé*, which of course consists of a single shot.

The Other Side of the Hedge uses a two-shot pattern round a hedge not unlike the three-shot one in *Ladies' Skirts*, but to greater effect. In shot one, a courting couple sitting in front of a hedge are kept apart by a chaperone. The chaperone settles down for a nap between them. The couple then disappears behind the hedge, but the spectators, and the chaperone when she wakes momentarily and looks anxiously for her charges, can see their hats sticking up over the hedge a decent distance apart. Shot two is the 180°-shot from the other side of the hedge: the hats, the spectator now sees, are attached to sticks and the couple are kissing in between them. The gap between the image given in one shot, and the truth given in the second, a truth denied the censorious chaperone, creates an irony out of the change in viewpoint. (It is interesting that two out of three contemporary accounts of this film – in *Biograph Bulletin* no 38, 1904, and *The Optical Lantern and Kinematograph Journal*, 1905, as opposed to the manufacturers' 1906 'Hepwix' Catalogue entry – cannot describe it properly, because they cannot separate a description of the shots from a version of the story being told, when the point of the film is the eventually resolved discrepancy between them; this failure suggests an important threshold in the development of film narration.) On the other hand, neither shot is a true POV shot. In the first, although we see no more of the other side of the hedge than the chaperone, we see more than she does in that we see her. In the second, we are put into complicity with the couple who are assumed to know what we have seen, that the chaperone has been duped.

This kind of simple irony of differing viewpoints held together by narrative positioning can of course be linked to true POV. In *A Friendly Marriage*, the wife sees the husband and vicar's daughter apparently lovers, whereas we already know that the husband loves the wife and is secretly earning a living, with secretarial help from the vicar's daughter; but the irony is resolved for the characters in the next shot, when the wife accuses him and he explains. More is at stake here than a mere wifely misunderstanding (as sexuality enters this Platonic marriage, money and initiative in it shift from the wife to the husband), but the discrepancy between characters' and spectator's knowledge is only incidental to the narrative structure as a whole.

Narratives entirely constructed around these discrepancies are in fact to be found in the films Griffith made for Biograph between 1909 and 1912, despite the consistent refusal of POV structures in these films, and their reluctance to cut within the same space, especially in interiors. *The Drive for a Life* has one non-POV insert of an action, *Gold is not All* one insert of a letter; otherwise they consist of one-shot scenes and ordinary or alternating sequences. Yet both depend on hierarchies of relative knowledge and deception.

⁷ Editor's note: The author uses the term 'girl' throughout to indicate the ingenu role of such characters.

In *The Drive for a Life*, a man abandons his mistress in order to marry a respectable girl.⁷ (The *Biograph Bulletin* no 233, 1909, insists the former relationship is completely innocent and the 'mistress' French and a widow into the bargain, but the titles leave the precise relationships so vague as to make mistress the most obvious reading; moreover, it provides a better motivation for her subsequent actions and more powerful identification with her.) After he has said goodbye, the ex-mistress goes out on an errand, riding in a horse-cab. Meanwhile, the man is showing off his motor car to his new fiancée. The two routes intersect, and the ex-mistress in her cab sees the couple in the car; but they do not see her. Driven into a jealous rage by this sight, she puts poison in some sweets (insert of this) and sends them with a forged covering note by special messenger to the fiancée. The man arrives at her house to reclaim his love-letters, discovers what she has done, and races in his car to arrive in the nick of time to prevent the fiancée eating the poisoned sweets.

The switchback that ends the film, between shots of the speeding car and the obstacles to its arrival on the one hand, and shots of the delivery, unwrapping and preparation for eating of the sweets on the other, is the device for which Griffith is most famous (although he probably did not invent it), so it is worth emphasising that it too depends for its suspense on the discrepancy of knowledge between the spectator and the fiancée receiving, opening and preparing to eat the sweets supposedly sent by her lover. But more interesting for my purposes is the scene where the ex-mistress oversees the man with his new fiancée. It is filmed in one shot from the back of an unseen car travelling in front of the chauffeur-driven car in the back seat of which the man and his fiancée are seated. After a while, the cab enters left from a side road and drives along behind the couple's car. Finally the couple's car leaves frame right, and the mistress orders the cab to turn back the way it had come. The murderous jealousy which constitutes the narrative is set up in this one complex shot, through the spectator's sharing in the greater knowledge of the ex-mistress and recognition of the vulnerable ignorance of the couple.

Gold is not All adds a third layer to these two. It tells the parallel stories of two couples, a poor couple and a rich couple. They court and marry more or less simultaneously and both couples have children. The only direct link between them, apart from living in the same neighbourhood, is that the poor girl does the rich couple's laundry. The narrative alternates between the two stories, and we learn, not surprisingly, that one couple is poor but happy, the other rich but unhappy. But the symmetry between the two couples is deceptive: in fact the spaces they occupy are segregated into an inside, occupied by the rich couple, and an outside, occupied by the poor couple. This is marked not only by the fact that, whereas the rich couple's life takes place largely in interiors (sets), the poor couple are never seen inside their humble cottage; but also, and more significantly, by the fact that the rich couple live on an estate bounded by a wall. The key scene in the film, while both couples are courting, is filmed looking along this wall, with the street outside on the left and the park inside on the right. Both couples appear, initially each



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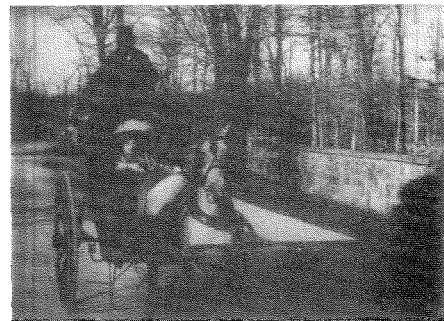
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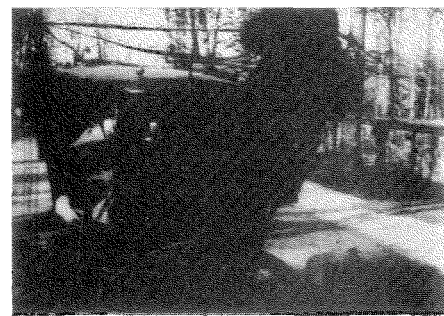
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Intersecting routes and murderous jealousy in one complex shot: *The Drive for a Life*, 1909.

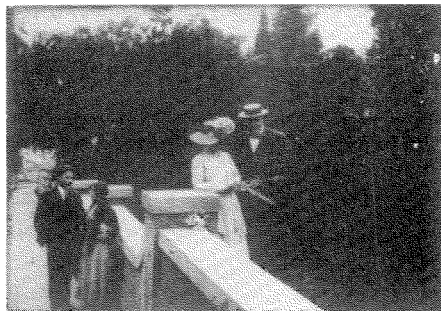
couple absorbed in itself. Then the poor couple see the rich couple over the wall and gaze at them in envy. The rich couple, oblivious, leave right, the poor couple shake their heads in sad resignation and leave left. This asymmetry of awareness is repeated throughout the film. Even in their own space, the poor cast many a backward glance towards the rich estate. The rich couple, on the other hand, are oblivious of the poor, until they intrude directly on them, when they (the rich) behave with embarrassed and uncomprehending condescension (in the first scene the poor girl picks up the handkerchief the rich girl has dropped and hands it to her; during the climactic party at the rich house, the poor girl arrives with the laundry at the wrong door and has to be hurriedly redirected). But the narrative (and the titles) provide a third perspective: the rich are ignorant of the poor; the poor see the rich and envy them; the spectator knows rich and poor and knows the poor do not realise how unhappy the rich really are. Inside and outside on the screen duplicate inside and outside in the movie-house.

This is the structure of Laurel's 'scene at the "movies"'. Point of view, in the sense of narrative perspective, the measurement of the relative perceptions and knowledge of the characters by the development of the narrative, is here achieved without point-of-view shots. This is done by finding narrative actions and settings where the look and its object can be staged in one shot, or by dividing the narrative space into contrasting sections linked by much more generalized or even metaphorical looks (when the poor heroine of *Gold is not All* looks back over her shoulder 'at' the rich estate as she stands by the door of her cottage, it is not what she *physically* sees that concerns the narrative or the spectator). Notoriously, Griffith did not develop or ever really acclimatize himself to the 'just-off-the-eyeline-shot-reverse-shot' system which became the 'classical' method of scene editing by the end of the War. *True Heart Susie*, which is an extension of the pyramid of knowledge of *Gold is not All* to feature length (Susie knows more than William, but the spectator knows that and what she knows, and also what neither knows) still prefers long shots and 'concertina' cut-ins to close-ups from the same angle. Early examples of that system I have seen – *The Loafer*, *His Last Fight*, *Detective Burton's Triumph* – all use it in the context of fights, whereas the 'point-of-view' structure of the Griffith films is essentially passive (although it can give rise to subsequent aggression – the poisoned sweets). Although I cannot trace the process in detail, it seems clear that when the 'classical' system came to incorporate less aggressive contexts, it absorbed the Griffithian point-of-view structure, and combined together technical and narrative point of view.

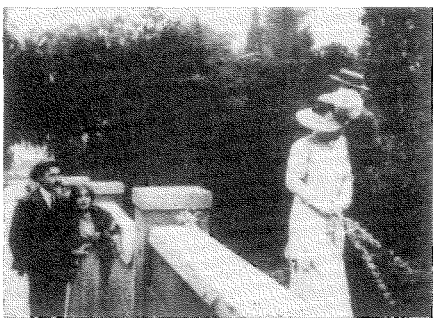
One final characteristic of the establishment of this cinema: what might be called the extra twist of fictionality it brought with it. Many American films made before 1910 involve a plot where a worker hero (usually a foreman rather than a simple workman) is in conflict, usually over his girlfriend or wife, sometimes herself a worker, with another higher-ranking blackguardly employee – a supervisor (eg, *The Mill Girl*, *The Paymaster*). The foreman displaces the super-



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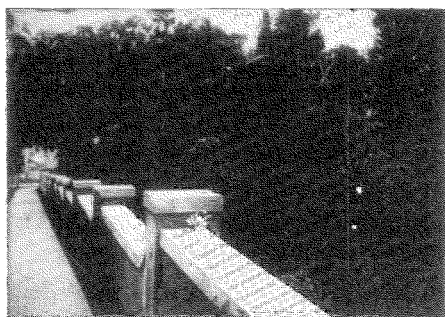
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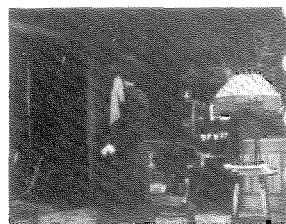


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Asymmetry of awareness: the courting scene in *Gold is not All*, 1910.

visor in the mill-girl's affections, or rescues her from his unwelcome attentions, and is then the victim of some conspiracy on the supervisor's part, which is finally uncovered, the happy couple are united and the villain punished – or the girl is unjustly suspected of infidelity with a (less blackguardly) supervisor, leading to friction between the men, finally resolved by the opportunity for selfless heroism presented by an accident at work (*The Tunnel Workers*). The sets in these films are typically sketchy functional ones, providing a space for the action and painted decor indicating the milieu; but exteriors and a few interiors are filmed in 'real' surroundings – *The Paymaster* in a real (though disused) New England mill, *The Tunnel Workers*, spectacularly, at the top of the shafts of the works for the Pennsylvania Tunnel from New York City to Long Island. Thus the films can be said to have a naive realism – made for the nickelodeon market when the latter was already becoming reasonably unified but was still confined to a lower-middle- and working-class clientele, they reflect that milieu in the most direct possible way, confining themselves largely to it and filming directly in its real surroundings.

The films of the early teens I have been principally discussing have changed this. Their heroes and heroines are from the respectable, even rich middle class, and the locations and especially the sets are chosen, designed and furnished to convey luxury and fashion. Even more strikingly, the poor have become a picture-book poor, living a carefree life in little cottages with roses round the porch. A shift in the centre of the fiction from the presentation of scenes to the presentation of differing character perspectives on scenes, and a displacement of point of view from a mechanism for articulating diegetic space to one for articulating characters' knowledge, go with a move from the direct photography of real environments to the presentation of a world much more penetrated by phantasy. The American cinema, not yet in Hollywood (although *Gold is not All* was filmed in Pasadena), is becoming a dream factory. The remark is not made either in a spirit of civically responsible condemnation, or one of surrealist celebration – the examples hardly suit either response: the story of *The Mill Girl* is no more socially responsible than that of *Gold is not All*, and by 1925 the latter seemed embarrassingly naive to Linda Arvidson, who played the poor girl in it⁸ – but in order to re-emphasise the cinematicity of the 'scene at the "movies"' that, by 1923, could be reappropriated by popular literature.



fantasy perspectives: luxurious
s (top) and picture-book
verty (below) in *Gold is not All*.



⁸ See Mrs D W Griffith (Linda Arvidson): *When the Movies Were Young*, New York 1925, p 147.

This article was first presented as a paper at Dartington College of Arts in the course of a weekend school entitled 'Inventing the Cinema' in October-November 1980. It has been slightly modified in the light of discussions then and subsequent events, especially teaching a course on early film form at the University of Kent and reading *The Classical Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson (forthcoming). I should like also to thank Barry Salt, who drew my attention to most of the films discussed here and in particular to the key scene in *Gold is not All*, Elaine Burrows and the National Film Archive, London, who provided the prints and whose main catalogue is the source of most of the filmographic data, and Jim Styles for the photographs.

The following is a chronological list of all the films mentioned in this article. Dates are release dates in the producing country or (if preceded by ©) US copyright dates. Lengths are in most cases as given in contemporary catalogues and hence approximate, and are in feet for 35mm prints. Titles in square brackets are those given by the NFA to unidentified films. Titles in round brackets are English release titles of foreign-made films. Abbreviations: pc = production company; d = director; ph = photographer; sc = scenario; lp = leading players (character names in brackets).

L'arroseur arrosé (*Watering the Gardener*), France, pc Lumière, ph Louis Lumière, lp Clerc (Gardener), Duval (Boy), 1896, 55ft.

Grandma's Reading Glass, UK, pc GAS Films, September 1900, 100ft. (The same print has also been claimed for the Alpha Trading Co, d Arthur Melbourne-Cooper, 1899.)

[*Ladies' Skirts Nailed to a Fence*] UK, pc Bamforth, 1900 (?), 68ft.

[*The Lady's Ankle*], France (?), 1901 (?).

Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième (*Scenes from My Balcony*), France, pc Pathé Frères, d Ferdinand Zecca, 1901, 130ft.

The Gay Shoe Clerk, USA, pc Edison Film Manufacturing Co, August 12 1903, 75ft.

Mary Jane's Mishap, or Don't Fool with the Paraffin, UK, pc GAS Films, d GA Smith, February 1903, 250ft.

A Search for Evidence, USA, pc American Mutoscope and Biograph, ph Billy Bitzer, lp Kathryn Osterman, © August 3 1903, 217ft.

Falsely Accused, UK, pc Hepworth Film Manufacturing Co, d Lewin Fitzhamon, May 1903, 850ft.

The Other Side of the Hedge, UK, pc Hepworth Film Manufacturing Co, d Lewin Fitzhamon, January 1905, 100ft. (Stills originate in a US Library of Congress paper print.)

The Paymaster, USA, pc American Mutoscope and Biograph, d Mr Harrington, lp Gene Gauntier, Jim Slevin, Gordon Busby, © June 23 1906, 685ft. (Stills originate in a US Library of Congress paper print.)

The Tunnel Workers, USA, pc American Mutoscope and Biograph, ph Frank Dobson, lp Jim Slevin, Kate Tonway, Guy Hedlund, © November 10 1906, 813ft.

The Mill Girl, USA, Vitagraph Company of America, © September 17 1907, 689ft.

The Drive for a Life, USA, pc American Mutoscope and Biograph, d DW Griffith, ph Billy Bitzer, Harry Marvin, lp Arthur Johnson, Clark T Bracey, Marion Leonard (?), April 22 1909, 940ft.

Gold is not All, USA, pc Biograph Co, d DW Griffith, ph Billy Bitzer, lp Linda Arvidson (Poor Girl), Marion Leonard (Rich Girl), Del Henderson (Rich Boy), Mack Sennett (Poor Boy), Gladys Egan, Kate Bruce (Poor Girl's Mother), Alfred Paget, W Christie Miller, © April 1 1910, 988ft.

A Friendly Marriage, USA, pc Vitagraph Company of America, lp Earle Williams (Lord Towne), Lillian Walker (?) (Lady Towne), September 5 1911, 1000ft. (This film is listed by the NFA as *Love's Awakening*, pc Vitagraph Company of America, April 19 1910, but a more complete print of the same film in the Library of Congress collection is entitled *A Friendly Marriage*; I am indebted to Kristin Thompson for this attribution.)

The Loafer, USA, pc Essanay Film Manufacturing Co, March 17 1911 (UK release), 999ft.

The Voice of the Child, USA, pc Biograph Co, d DW Griffith, ph Billy Bitzer, lp Blanche Sweet, Kate Bruce, Dolores Del Rio (?), © December 29 1912, 1053ft.

His Last Fight, USA, pc Vitagraph Company of America, d Ralph Ince, lp Ralph Ince, Anita Stewart, Gladdin James, October 18 1913, 1000ft.

Detective Burton's Triumph, USA, pc Reliance, lp Eugene Palette, Sam de Grasse, Billie West, 1914, 1907ft.

True Heart Susie, USA, pc Artcraft, d DW Griffith, ph Billy Bitzer, sc Mirion Fremont, lp Lillian Gish (Susie), Robert Harron (William), Clarine Seymour (Bettina), June 1 1919, 6 reels.

Stella Dallas, USA, pc Sam Goldwyn Inc, d Henry King, ph Arthur Edeson, sc Frances Marion, lp Ronald Coleman (Stephen Dallas), Belle Bennett (Stella Dallas), Alice Joyce (Helen Morrison), Jean Hersholt (Ed Munn), Lois Moran (Laurel Dallas), Douglas Fairbanks Jr (Richard Grosvenor III), February 24 1926 (© November 16 1925), 10157ft.

Stella Dallas, USA, pc Sam Goldwyn Inc, d King Vidor, lp John Boles (Stephen Dallas), Barbara Stanwyck (Stella Dallas), Anne Shirley (Laurel Dallas), Alan Hale (Ed Munn), © August 24 1937, 9696ft.

NARRATIVE/DIEGESIS— THRESHOLDS, LIMITS

NOËL BURCH QUESTIONS THE
CENTRALITY OF NARRATIVE TO THE
EXPERIENCE OF FILM.

¹ In its simplest definition, the word *diegesis* 'designates the film's represented instance—that is to say, the sum of a film's denotation: the narration itself, but also the fictional space and time dimensions implied in and by the narrative, and consequently the character, the landscapes, the events and other narrative elements insofar as they are considered in their denoted aspect' (Christian Metz, *Film Language*, Oxford University Press, New York 1974). See also Etienne Souriau, 'La structure de l'univers filmique et le vocabulaire de la filmologie', *Revue internationale de filmologie*, 7-8, pp 231-40.

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE is undeniably vitiated by what is still a fundamentally empiricist stance. However, at the stage I have reached in my thinking about film, I feel the need to come to grips, albeit naively, with an issue which to many will smack of a specious essentialism, but which I regard as absolutely unavoidable.

I must confess, however, that I find myself hard pressed to define this issue in rigorous terms. For a start, I might say that what I see at stake is *the status of the experience of the mainstream narrative cine-film*. The problem is, perhaps, to situate the historical, social, aesthetic space which we call mainstream narrative film—the production/consumption cycle of the Cinema Institution—in terms of what is essential to that space, of what determines its unity, its specificity within the larger sphere of cultural production.

I have been inclined in recent years, borrowing a term from the earliest film semiotics (Souriau, Metz)¹ to refer to the general² experience of the classical film in terms of *diegetic production* at the level of transmission, *diegetic effect* at the level of reception and *diegetic process* to encompass the two. *Diegesis*, except as an abbreviation for diegetic process, seems to me a word that has lost much of its usefulness, because it is either too vague to accommodate dialectical rigour or too mechanical: diegesis-as-thing. Now, one of my contentions is that this process can be triggered off in a filmic context independently of the presence of any narrative structure, and that one may consequently see it, rather than narrative, as the true seat of cinema's 'power of fascination'.

The issue also has a diachronic dimension, which is perhaps of more than speculative interest: are there, I might phrase it, any grounds for hypothesizing an essential, constitutive difference between the spectatorial experience of the mainstream 'silent' (mute) film and the main-

stream talkie, or between that of the classical narrative film in general and that of the audience in the Salon Indien, purportedly starting up from their seats as that 'train entering station' apparently bore down upon them? And is there any such difference between the experience of American television (taken as a limit instance among the televisions of the capitalist world) and that of the mainstream film viewed in a cinema? However, the theoretical (synchronic) axis of the issue remains central to my mind; only when it has been satisfactorily posed can the historical issue be studied with the proper relevancy: is narrative itself really central to the very characteristic experience which we associate with classical narrative film?

This formulation is paradoxical by design. I believe that the apprehension of the mainstream or institutional continent of cinema as exactly coextensive with that of narrative is misleading: it hides the fact that however closely they have been associated historically, there are two distinct levels in the experience of the classical film. As certain limit instances show, the diegetic effect can be fully achieved in the total absence of narrative in any of its accepted forms (and I include, of course, the documentary narrative). Historically, narrative was no doubt the armature upon which the illusion of presence was effectively constructed, but in later years, and especially with the introduction of live sound, the autonomy of this presence became so great that it could survive in wholly non-narrative contexts.

I also wish to examine the possible distinction between the fully diegetic film and the imperfectly or weakly diegetic film. Again, in my opinion, such gradations depend not upon the absence or presence – or the relative degree of development – of narrative structures, but hinge, more fundamentally, on such factors as movement (both pro-filmic and camera), live sound, the readability of the picture track and even, to an extent, upon the use of shot-counter-shot and the other strategies of camera-ubiquity.

Finally, I will touch upon the evolution of modern commercial television, exemplified by that of the United States – and a certain popular cinema that is an outgrowth of it – which involves a deliberate 'detensification' of the diegetic process in favour of a form of 'induced disengagement', a fascinated non-involvement which is several removes in passivity away from 'the spell of motion pictures'... and which constitutes a new and potent weapon in the media arsenal of capitalism, pointing towards even more disquieting developments to come.

The Diegetic Effect in Early Film

There is no reason to doubt the reports that some spectators started up from their seats when first they saw Lumière's train rushing at them where they sat, comfortably ensconced at their tables in the Salon Indien. However, I question fundamentally the notion, so often and so glibly bandied about, that this was the first manifestation of the *cinematic*

² General within the mass audience of developed Western nations – although even in our cities a Black audience will tend to turn a Cleopatra Jones movie into an 'epic' ceremony, and children will do the same to almost any film. Still, the experience I refer to, observable for a James Bond film in the West End or a screening at the NFT, remains by far the majority experience in the West.

³ Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier*, Macmillan, London 1982.

⁴ Maxim Gorky, 'A review of the Lumière programme at the Nizhni-Novgorod Fair, as printed in ... July 4, 1896 ...', in Jay Leyda (ed), *Kino*, Allen and Unwin Ltd, London 1960.

⁵ The earliest film I know which seems to display a complete mastery of the institutional *découpage* is Maurice Tourneur's *A Girl's Folly* in which the principle of camera ubiquity (in the film-studio sequences) is displayed with a skill still absent from such milestones as Barker/Ince's *The Italian* or DeMille's *The Cheat* (both 1915). Whatever the case, it is during these crucial years that the decisive threshold is crossed.

illusion. As Christian Metz reminded us a few years ago,³ belief in the cinematic image as an analogue of real phenomena, if it ever was an hallucination (such as might be induced by drugs or psychosis, for example), has long ceased to be one; it is, indeed, a *willing* suspension of disbelief, an emotional involvement which may certainly attain great depths of anguish or compassion, but which is always grounded in the awareness that the subject is 'only watching a film'. It is in this respect, Metz further suggests, that the filmic experience resembles that of the phantasy rather than the dream.

The first spectators of *l'Entrée d'un train en gare*, reacting with their whole bodies, to what they perceived as an external manifestation, were indeed in a brief hallucinatory state, their unfamiliarity with the messages they were receiving having induced a state of mild sensorial confusion.

Even such a sophisticated viewer as Maxim Gorki, though understanding no doubt how the Cinématographe worked, and prepared in any event for what he was going to see, seems to have experienced similar hallucinations: 'Carriages coming ... straight at you ... into the darkness in which you sit. ... a train appears on the screen. It speeds straight at you - watch out! ... You imagine the spray will reach you and you want to shield yourself.' But even if these are not simply facile hyperbole - feigned hallucinations whose true experience are implicitly attributed to others - Gorki takes significant care to distinguish between these hallucinatory effects of moving photographs and the illusion of full presence which he equated with *reality*: '... no rumble of the wheels is heard,' the train was 'but a train of shadows', you could not hear 'the gurgle of the water as it gushes from the hose'.⁴

Gorki's well-known text, with its call for sound, colour, and the presence afforded by the close-up (*le Déjeuner de Bébé* is the only film which he warms to in a personal sense) constitutes a precocious denunciation of primitive cinema's 'lack' as it was to be perceived by the middle-classes, and especially the intelligentsia. He was also setting forth, over three decades before its accomplishment, the parameters of that ultimate goal of what gradually became the hegemonic tendency in motion pictures: the achievement of *the full diegetic effect*.

This achievement, which I situate at the dawn of synchronized sound, constitutes a major threshold. In the USA and Europe, classical cinema had in one sense reached full growth, with all its basic *visual* strategies (including the most enveloping version of the shot-counter-shot) since at least 1917⁵. Yet is it not verifiable in many ways that lip-synch sound immediately became an essential constituent of a fuller diegetic process than the silent cinema had known? This, I suggest, is the chief reason why involvement in silent film narrative requires a certain apprenticeship today: it is the relative weakness of its diegetic effect which perturbs the uninitiated viewer, rather than any difficulty in assimilating the standard narrative codes of the '20s. I take this as a preliminary indication of the relative autonomy of the narrative and diegetic principles.

Conversely, it is undeniable that the reproduction, within this new substance of expression (film), of structures analogous to those of classi-

cal narrative *in general*, contributed historically to the gradual enrichment of the diegetic process – shot-counter-shot, for example, developed as an essentially narrative procedure – between 1906 and 1929. I nonetheless maintain that even before the advent of synch sound, that relative autonomy is demonstrable. In fact, I believe that if there is any useful answer to the perennial question of cinema's specificity, it seems reasonable to suggest that within the broad spectrum of the classical narrative in general, it is the singular strength of its diegetic production that situates cinema apart, that has made it a uniquely powerful tool, not merely of social control but of social and even revolutionary mobilization as well.

The term *diegesis* was revived and appropriated by Etienne Souriau to account for a phenomenon which most scholars have associated peculiarly with cinema – and this in itself points to a privileged status among the other signifying practices. However, there is no doubt whatsoever that a literary narrative, for example, involves a diegetic process, most specifically by the adjunction to the description of the narrative action proper (which also partakes of diegetic production, of course) of descriptions of places, people, clothing, sounds, odours, etc. Moreover, one can easily imagine (and in fact find, among the productions of the *nouveau roman*) non-narrative fictional writing, consisting solely of description and excluding the minimal components of narrative – *virtualité, passage à l'acte, achèvement*, according to the post-Proppian definition given by Claude Brémont⁶ – which would nonetheless conjure up that imaginary world which we so easily evoke in connection with the diegetic effect. However, the almost inevitable unreadability – in the Barthesian sense – of non-narrative fiction, in contrast with the eminent readability of, say, those impressionistic documentaries or sequences of nature scenes with musical sound tracks used to fill gaps in TV programming, does suggest that the diegetic effect in literature is more closely intertwined with the narrative process, no doubt because of the symbolic, discontinuous nature of the typographic sign – as opposed to the iconic, continuous nature of the cinematic sign. Hence, perhaps, in literature the more rapid breakdown of diegetic process upon the 'withdrawal' of narrative.

Literature also makes clear that the diegetic effect can be manifested with varying degrees of intensity: do not those sparse narratives imagined by Borgès often seem closer to Propp's bare résumés of Russian folk tales than to, say, a Balzac *conte*, precisely because they are more weakly diegetic than a text like *la Fille aux yeux d'or*?

Before proceeding further, I must deal with a question of terminology: is the diegetic effect equivalent to the 'illusion of reality' so generally ascribed to film (and leaving aside the historical aspect of this problem, as outlined above)? Though experientially, the phenomenon may be the same, from a theoretical point of view, a distinction between these two concepts appears crucial. For what we are talking about is, of course, no illusion at all in any rigorous sense; whatever-it-is does not resemble reality, as any of us actually experience it, in any convincing way (a comparison with 3D films is edifying in this respect). The historical

⁶ Claude Brémont,
Logique du récit,
Editions du Seuil,
Paris 1973, pp 131
ff.

⁷ Barthes speaks of the apparent fusion between connotational and denotational levels of signification in the still photograph. In the talking cinema the (con)fusion between these two levels is far more complete, not only because of the syntagmatic extension (in time) of the denotational level but also because of the complete material integration of the specifying textual level of signification which, with the photograph, is always writing, i.e. non-analogical. (The system of the silent cinema is much closer to the advertising poster than to that of the talkies.)

maximization of the diegetic effect has in fact resulted from the accumulation of only a limited number of pertinent indices of phenomenal reality. The colour threshold itself was diegetically trivial in comparison with that of lip-synch sound. And the apparent non-pertinence here of the lack of any indices other than audio-visual (the sporadic careers of Smellorama, Sensurround are tangible signs of this), as well as the continuing audience preference for the imaginary tri-dimensionality of institutional screen-space over the truly illusionistic tri-dimensionality of stereo films, incline one to believe that the term 'illusion of reality' is a substitute, of nineteenth-century origin, for what is in fact a rationally selective system of symbolic exchange.

This is not to say, however, that the peculiar impact of the cinematic diegesis does not derive, as has often been stressed, from the fact that it involves almost exclusively iconic signification – and the replacement of the printed title by the spoken voice was a decisive step in the establishment of an iconic hegemony. After 1930, nearly all the narrative signifiers (with the important exception of music, and an occasional passage of off-screen commentary) are diegetic as well, whereas in literature, for example, there is usually a great deal of extra-diegetic voice over. But of course the diegetic effect in literature is always mediated in a way in which it is not in cinema, where the narrative and diegetic processes tend to fuse⁷, causing, of course, the frequent heuristic confusion between them.

The 'illusion of fusion' is also to some extent a construct, with a history of its own. The development of such narrative figures as the syntagma of simultaneity, successiveness and proximity is co-extensive with the emergence of strong spectatorial identification with the motion picture camera, that linchpin of the full-blown diegetic effect in film.

The Threshold of Synchronized Sound

Is it meaningful to assign a single 'threshold of emergence' to the diegetic process which we today associate with moving photographic pictures and lip-synch sound? No doubt, such a threshold was crossed when people around the world began seeing projected photographic images, familiar enough via the magic lantern, actually 'come to life' before their eyes, as Gorki had at Aumont's café: 'You anticipate nothing new in this all too familiar scene, for you have seen pictures of Paris streets more than once. But suddenly a strange flicker passes through the screen and the pictures stir to life.'

And surely the coming of the talkies was a decisive threshold as well.

I am tempted to see 1895 and 1927 as the confines of a period of gestation, which saw the emergence of such acquisitions as colour and spoken titles, but above all of the system of narrative editing, and which climaxed as this latter merged with lip-synch sound to over-determine the full diegetic effect.

Can we, however, exclude from this historical space the experience of

the viewers of the sophisticated magic lantern shows of late nineteenth century Britain, which involved prefigurations of camera ubiquity, realistically tinted photography, voice, music and sound effects?⁸ Or, for that matter, the spectators of Daguerre's dioramas or Robertson's *phantasmagories*? And what of the stereoscope? What of photography itself?

It seems clear enough today that the introduction of the analogical replication of movement adds a decisive element to photographic signification. True, the enlargement to screen-size through projection enhanced the analogical power of the photograph, and sequencing introduced a concatenation of the iconic signifiers impossible in the single photograph. But it is precisely the seamless concatenation of film frames which makes this plane of signification as continuous as iconic signification itself, naturalizing it in a way that even the dissolving views could not. Similarly, thirty odd years later, a technology born of the vacuum tube made it possible to naturalize the noun, integrating it into the iconic continuum in a way which neither the lantern-lecturer nor the cine-lecturer could achieve.

⁸ Cecil Hepworth notes in his memoirs (*Came the Dawn*, 1951) that when Burt Acres first showed him animated photographs projected on a screen, his familiarity with the lantern was such that he was not, at the time, particularly impressed. The implications of what he had witnessed did not become clear until some months later.

Camera Identification and Character Identification

In the accompanying essay, Ben Brewster stresses the centrality to the novelistic text of strategies of point of view and demonstrates how Griffith was at pains to introduce them early in his Biograph career, as he undertook to sophisticate the narrative mode of the early American film. In the exemplary *Gold is not All* (1910), audience identification with the poor-but-happy couple is effortlessly achieved through a *mise-en-scène* which produces the rich-but-wretched family as scene, viewed from the place of the poor couple, perpetually shown peering in at the rich from the outside, a situation of comfortable, 'ring-side omniscience', paralleling that of the cine-spectator. And indeed, it is from the films of Griffith and his contemporaries that we may date the origin of a carefully hierarchized narrative system which makes it possible, lacking any but the grossest equivalents of the nuances of person enjoyed by the classical novel, to privilege the viewpoint of the character(s) with whom spectators are 'programmed' to identify (even if, as in *Gold is not All*, it is these characters' opposite numbers, insistently produced as *other*, who appear most often on the screen: our gaze has become the external gaze of the 'happy poor', *even in their absence*). It is this strategy of narrative viewpoint, often asserted without the recourse to 'subjective camera'—still a rare stance in 1910, even in the work of Griffith—which would henceforth perennially serve to naturalize such assertions as 'the poor are happier than the rich.'

Undeniably, identification with *the gaze that tells* is essential to the power of classical bourgeois narrative—both on the screen and in the novel. I would argue, however, that the specific experience defined by the cinema institution involves, as Jean-Louis Baudry and later Christian Metz have argued, a primal identification with *the gaze that sees*, the gaze

⁹ cf Kalton C Lahue (ed), *Motion Picture Pioneer: The Selig Polyscope Company*, Barnes & Co, New York 1973, p 63.

that *is-there*, with the point of view of the camera. In the current debate around these issues, I would argue resolutely in Baudry's and Metz' favour because my own examination of the genealogy of 'film language' supports their thesis.

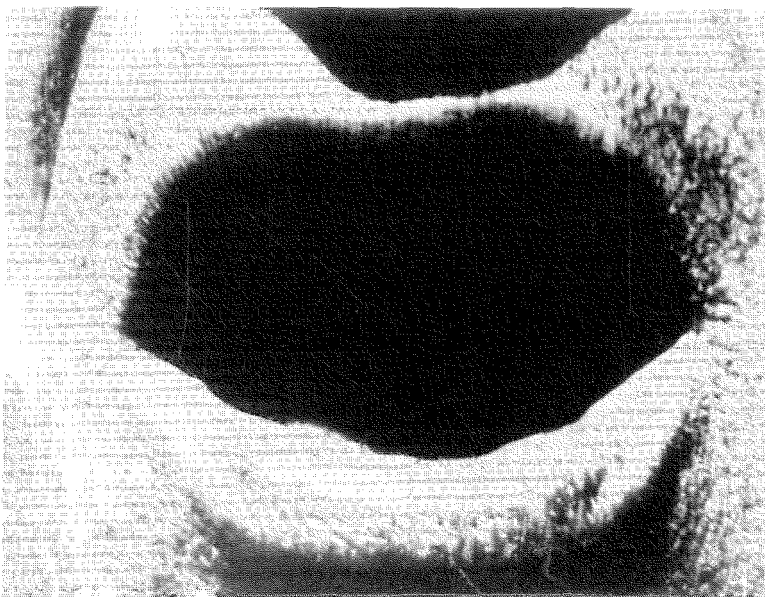
Each of the successive identifiable acquisitions of this 'language' – more aptly: this mode of visual representation – may be analysed in terms of its role in the over-determination of this quasi-primal identification. This relatively long process of gestation (1895-1925) comprised the re-creation on the screen of the perspectival box of the Renaissance, the mastery of the moving camera, and the refinement of all the other strategies of that camera ubiquity whose signified is summed up in the shot-counter-shot: *the absence/presence of the spectator at the very centre of the diegetic process*. All of these factors clearly converge upon a single, supreme effect, embarking the spectator on that motionless journey which is the essence of the institutional cinematic experience. Through this constant identification with the camera's viewpoint, the experience of the classical film interpellates us solely as *incorporeal individuals*.

One of the critical thresholds crossed in the course of this historical movement was the ban, by certain American companies around 1910⁹, against actors looking at the camera. In the land of Griffith, Barker and DeMille, it was recognized much earlier than in France, for example, that the glance at the camera addressed itself explicitly to the spectator as corporeal individual, produced him/her as seated in a darkened theatre looking at dancing shadows on a screen. The music-hall entertainer's glance, the melodrama villain's, addressed the audience collectively – in contexts, moreover which were more presentational than representational (the bourgeois stage had long since eliminated the aside). The cine-actor's eye, on the contrary, when it encounters the cine-lens, drills straight at the individual, wherever he/she may be sitting. Now, in order to increase the cine-spectator's sense of *being-there*, it was necessary to eliminate the camera from the (apparent) consciousness of the actors; they had ostensibly to ignore it. For the spectator to receive as directed at him/her a gaze at the camera had become tantamount to the hidden voyeur's shock when his/her gaze is unmasked and *returned*. As a condition of being able to 'take off', to enter that 'other scene' of the film; to feel him/herself freely evolving within it, the spectator had to feel him/herself *unobserved*. The ban on looking at the camera was, in particular, a fundamental condition for the integration of the close-up into the editing scheme – the closer the shot, the greater the shock of the glance at the lens – and for the full achievement of personal – narrative – identification.

Camera identification finds its firmest anchorage in that key figure, the shot-counter-shot, whereby the spectator becomes the invisible mediator between two gazes, two discourses which envelop him/her, positioned thus as the ideal, invisible voyeur. It is a measure of the extent to which the French cinema, still clinging to the presentationalism of the popular theatre, lagged behind the American as regards the assimilation of the institutional mode, that French actors were still making asides at

the camera as late as 1915 (cf. Feuillade's masterpiece, *les Vampires*).

It is becoming evident that the English 'gentlemen primitives' (of Brighton and elsewhere) displayed an uncanny sensitivity to these issues, due no doubt to the upper middle-class origins that were unique among turn-of-the-century cinéastes, and to their experience with the lantern. Williamson's famous film, *The Big Swallow*—correctly regarded as a 'lantern film'—seems almost to be an acting-out of this entire effacement /identification process. An upper-class fop threatens the operator with his waving cane as he approaches the camera, nearer and nearer... finally swallowing both (in a puerile cut-away trick shot). Then as the huge face retreats, chewing, it smiles at... the audience. What is remarkable here, is that the gaze addressed at the operator is directed so far off-camera that today's spectator does not spontaneously perceive it as a glance at anyone behind the camera at all. Williamson already seemed to sense that a gaze at an off-screen character in the vicinity of the camera (basis for the shot-reverse-shot) must not be into the lens. Only when camera and operator had been removed from the primary diegesis, could the actor look at the (second) camera, could he look at the audience with all the candour of the music-hall stars in primitive stand-up comedy films.



The camera consumed in *The Big Swallow*.

Gradually the rule became universal: a gaze towards the camera must never encounter the centre of the lens, a thin metal rim became the immutable frontier between an oblivious gaze just missing that of the invisible spectator and a gaze of direct address into his/her eyes: a character could look past—even *through*—the spectator at other characters, a landscape, etc, but a look into the lens was permitted only in rare cases of

¹⁰ In his novel *The Life of a Useless Man* (published in 1908, the year Griffith began his directing career at Biograph) Maxim Gorki attributes a significant phantasy to his young anti-hero, soon to be enrolled as a Tsarist police spy: 'Yevsey found many other good things about the church... When he sang without the music he closed his eyes firmly, allowing his clear alto voice to blend with the general chorus so that it would not be heard above the others; he completely lost himself in sheer delight as if overcome by a blissful sleep. In this drowsy state, it seemed to him he was drifting away from life and approaching some other gentle, peaceful existence. A thought took shape in his mind which he once expressed to his uncle. "Could a person live so that he could go anywhere and see everything, but nobody could see him?"'

¹¹ Octave Mannoni, *Clefs pour l'Imaginaire ou l'Autre Scène*, Editions du Seuil, Paris 1969, pp 9-33.

extra-narrative or farcical Laurel and Hardy type addresses to the audience. The spectator was allowed to experience an actor's or actress' gaze *almost but not quite* as if s/he were its recipient. The audience's invulnerability/involvement¹⁰ hinged henceforth upon a few scant seconds of eyeline angle.

Yet curiously enough, 40 years after the Selig Polyscope Company had included in a list of dos and don'ts for actors an explicit ban on looking at the camera, there was produced, in Hollywood itself, a film which deliberately violated that time-honoured taboo. The '40s and early '50s were Hollywood's experimental years and this experiment, at least, has remained absolutely unique in Hollywood history for the very good reason that it was a commercial failure.

And yet Robert Montgomery's gimmick for *The Lady in the Lake* was in fact a very reasonable one: he would simply transfer directly to the screen the first-person narrative technique that had long been successful precisely in this genre of fiction, the hard-boiled detective novel. However, the establishment of a literal equivalence between the narratively subjective camera (the institutional camera is *always* diegetically subjective) and the novelistic first person, re-introduced effects that were profoundly disruptive of the diegetic process. On the one hand, the long takes and elaborate, not to say pedantic, camera movements tended towards a denaturalization, a mechanization of the flux of signification: the long invisible camera suddenly interposed itself again between audience and diegetic world. Above all, however, the fact of these characters constantly looking straight into the lens simply gave the whole game away! The secret of the maximization of the diegetic process is the spectator's invulnerability. Attempting to squeeze narrative identification into the same point in the mental space of the filmic experience as that already occupied, as it were, by the subject of primal identification, was to pit the pot of clay against the pot of iron, as the French proverb goes. The character of Phillip Marlowe finds himself relegated to somewhere behind the spectator who suddenly finds him/herself thrust into the line of fire (and the choice of a rather distant tone for the detective almost seems to have been determined by the inevitable outcome of that unequal contest between the two modes of identification). In other words: how is it possible for 'me' to occupy 'my place' if 'I' am no longer invisible, if all those people keep looking 'at me'?

As recalled previously, the first person tense of camera identification involves a split, isomorphic but not identical with the split in spectatorial consciousness between the 'I know full well' and the 'but all the same' by which Octave Mannoni, in a seminal text¹¹ has compared the conditions of the theatrical illusion with the mechanism of disavowal as it is encountered in analytic practice. There is the tacit, unconscious 'I' of camera identification, the 'I' that experiences the diegetic process as unmediated phantasy experience. And then there is the 'I' of character identification, non-specific to cinema and only incidentally ensured, within the institutional framework, by point-of-view shots. The point-of-view shot, if we do not simply mean one member of the shot-counter-

shot, which more properly belongs to the subjectivity of 'primal', diegetic identification, is essentially contingent upon *action*, upon narrative incident. A film can easily contain no scenes in which the central character looks out a window at something to which the editor cuts or any similar situation. And yet it is perfectly possible for that film to be in the first person by the constant presence of the central figure on the screen, by the use of close-ups suggesting his/her thoughts, or through the use of voice over. In a sense, this is simply the equivalent of a well-known literary conceit, the disguised first person, achieved by comparable means. In fact the fundamental opposition between character-identification and camera-identification is that the former operates at the level of the (novelistic) signified of the classical film text, whilst the latter operates on the side of the signifier.



The camera attacked
in *The Lady in the
Lake*.

The Lady in the Lake, then, seeking to collapse the one into the other, could only succeed in expelling the subject from the film in a certain sense, and seriously compromising the full development of the diegetic process. A lesson learnt pragmatically some 40 years before was now at last demonstrated – theory in a practical state – for all to see.

Several such limit instances were produced in the immediate post-war Hollywood. Not surprisingly, all were carried out in conjunction with the telling of heavily coded crime-stories. But whereas Montgomery's abolition of the impunity of the spectatorial subject may be said to introduce a major diegetic disruption, Hitchcock's quasi-abolition of editing in *Rope*, Russell Rouse's abolition of dialogue in *The Thief* both demonstrate that neither of these major vehicles of narrative meaning are essential to the production of the (maximized) diegetic effect.

¹² Vladimir Nizhny, *Lessons with Eisenstein*, Ivor Montagu and Jay Leyda (trans and ed), Hill and Wang, New York 1962, pp 94-139.

¹³ The undoubted rationale behind the elimination (or near-elimination) of titles from such films as *The Wind*, *Der Letzte Mann* or *Ménilmontant* was indeed the heightening of diegetic homogeneity and hence of character and narrative presence.

For although Hitchcock derives some truly surreal effects from the viscous flow of real time, his film is in fact simply a rigorous demonstration of Eisenstein's thesis¹² that one can recreate classical montage within the confines of the single take through strategies of framing, blocking and camera movement alone. Hitchcock's constantly roving camera, always centred, always seeking the 'true' centre of the narrative (eg remaining focused on the maid clearing the chest that conceals the cadaver rather than concerning itself with banal after-dinner talk) ensures camera ubiquity/identification as surely as the most traditional editing scheme.

However mediocre artistically, *The Thief* is even more interesting from an heuristic point of view. It shows that the suppression not only of dialogue but of the act of speech itself does not necessarily produce a throwback to the diegetic level of the (titleless) films of the late silent era.¹³ As this film clearly demonstrates, the presence of synch sound effects is quite enough to raise the diegetic level to contemporary fullness (we keep *expecting* these characters to talk, they obviously have that capacity, we are just never there to hear it happen, but the synch sound effects are the guarantee of that potentially manifest presence).

We also encounter here a spectacular demonstration of the essentially narrative role, within the institution and especially since the mid-'30s, of the music which accompanies the diegesis. Incidental music in the sound film remains an extra-diegetic narrative signifier, just as it was in the 'silent' film. In *The Thief* it can be said to replace dialogue which normally it would complement or reduplicate. But, like the textless picture narrative itself, it can only speak in clichés, it can exclude ambiguity only at the cost of having recourse to a broad, heavily coded symbolism. This film lays bare the role of dialogue in the constitution of singularity in the classical film. For the uncaptioned photoplay, not unexpectedly, can communicate only the most highly coded narrative, peopled by gross stereotypes. In the USA of 1952, this was almost bound to be an archetypal Cold War fiction – an unmarried (!) scientist who Betrays His Country for some twisted, unknowable motive, is soon forced to Go Underground when Something Goes Wrong and finally, after a protracted, graphic Bout With His Conscience, finally decides to Turn Himself In.

If the diegetic effect can be said to be weakened here at all, it is through the transference of the brunt of the narrative burden from dialogue (and even from language in general: written texts are also eliminated as much as possible) to music. But this weakening exists only as a cumulative effect, brought about by the continued sense of frustration produced by the gimmick: any single sequence, taken by itself, appears at full diegetic strength, the way almost no sequence in *The Lady and the Lake* can do.

Is a lapse such as that instanced in *The Lady in the Lake* of greater or lesser impact upon the integrity of the diegetic process than, say, Dreyer's sophisticated return to frontality and his quasi-elimination of shot-counter-shot in *Gertrud*?

Wary, henceforth, of the pitfalls of quantification, I hesitate to answer

such questions. One thing is sure, however: for an audience culturally able to cope with the idiosyncracies of *Gertrud*, the meanings produced by its 'diegetic deficiency' (if such it can be termed) are bound to be very different from those conveyed by the wrong-headed gimmick of *The Lady in the Lake*. To an unsophisticated mass audience, however, the two inadequacies might easily appear equivalent, both films still being *readable*, but not comfortably so.

Indeed, there are a relatively large number of films which, while adhering to many essential norms of the institutional system, introduce concerted, positive strategies which tend to weaken the diegetic process in one way or another. Jean-Pierre Lefèbvre, in *le Vieux pays où Rimbaud est mort*, had his characters address the camera directly as a distancing strategy. The films of Ozu, as I have sought to demonstrate elsewhere¹⁴, involve temporary suspensions of diegetic presence (relative, that is, to a specific context: there are no non-diegetic images in Ozu). These suspensions are in the form of 'pillow shots', which punctuate all of his films after 1932. They are characterised by the temporary removal from the screen of the human figure,¹⁵ of synch sound (after 1935) and of movement, and these last two, as we have seen, are directly associated with the two fundamental thresholds in the history of diegetic process in film. Nor, it should be noted, are we dealing with a procedure such as the freeze-frame which permanently suspends the diegesis at the end of many a classical film, and which constitutes a facilitation of the painful withdrawal from the thrall of the diegetic process. The pillow-shots very definitely stand for a narrative duration, but one which they measure from outside the narrative properly so-called, and from the outer fringes of the diegetic space-time which may be said to contain it.

Chris Marker's eccentric film, *la Jetée*, making a knowing return to the magic lantern lecture, undertakes to extend a comparable weakening to the entire film (the full diegetic effect being alluded to only once: a shot of the young woman opening her eyes). However, the outer limits of diegetic production have seldom been systematically tested. They have, of course, been crossed, at least since Viking Eggling, many, many times. But it struck me some years ago that there was perhaps only one body of 'experimental' film-making which may be seen as applying itself specifically to the task of testing the limits of diegesis. I am referring to the work of Michael Snow.

The Limits of Diegesis

The film which first called my attention to this aspect of Snow's work was *la Région Centrale*. Here, it seemed evident, was a film which had achieved at last a self-reflexive utopia: the diegetic continuum was reduced wholly to the state of immanent referent – it was what we saw and heard, as opposed to the multiple layers of fiction and documentary films, whose diegetic space-time extends far beyond the shot; it became exactly co-extensive, not with narrative – narrative cannot be random in

¹⁴ *To the Distant Observer*, Scolar Press, London 1979, pp 160-172.

¹⁵ Characters are the structural centre of the diegetic world, the link between narrative and diegesis.

the sense that these complex pans were – but with the process of filmic production itself. Of course, this process was *represented* – at one remove for the picture, at two for the sound (those bleeps ‘controlling’ the camera at the end of its universally articulated crane were fictional, after-the-fact creations). But both were primary within the diegetic sphere, both were forcefully *present*, through the interaction of the two tracks: however fictitious, this synchronism provided an irrefutable guarantee of ‘liveness’. Thus, besides establishing what may be one inner threshold of diegetic production, the film indicated, by the very strength of its diegetic effect in the absence of any animate beings or of any ‘natural’ sound, that the minimal generation of diegetic process depends neither on narrative, nor synch sound originating in the image, nor even on pro-filmic movement, but can be generated by the image alone (the sound here is a digital translation of one dimension of the image). This is the case so long as the image is readable (at a certain speed, the blurring of the image suspends the diegetic process) and so long as camera-identification is ensured through movement. It is interesting to note that in this context, the appearance on the screen of the camera shadow impinges not at all upon the diegetic process: in fact, I would hazard that it actually reinforces the ‘I-but-not-I’ and the ‘there-but-not-there’ aspects of the identificational process: ‘I am the camera, but its shadow is not mine.’

Subsequently, as I looked back over Snow’s previous films, it became apparent that all of them, in one way or another, dealt explicitly with these issues.

The most comprehensive in this respect is Snow’s best-known work, *Wavelength*. During the 40 odd minutes which it takes for the camera-I to cross that Manhattan loft, the diegetic effect, the sense of camera identification indeed, is repeatedly lost and found again owing to various radical departures from and returns to the norms of conventional cinematography (as regards exposure, colour temperature, negative-positive relations, etc). At the same time, the threshold between the domain of diegetic process and other possible modes of writing/reading is continually manifested in the contrast between inside and outside: even when the image has been almost entirely washed out by over-exposure or tinted a deep shade of pink, such depredations are perceived as taking place inside (due in particular to the room’s emptiness of people and of pro-filmic movement), while outside, in the street, life goes on. It is remarkable that this decisive difference persists in spite of the fact that the departures from cinematographic norms affect that part of the frame as much as the rest. Here we have a further indication that movement constitutes one of the minimal conditions for diegetic production.

Wavelength also engages with the issue of the relations between narrative and diegetic process. Do the increasingly narrative moments of human activity strung out across the film – from the bringing in by movers of a ‘casing shelved’ to the discovery of a dead body by a young woman – determine actual intensifications of the diegetic effect? In my view, what we experience here is the *centering* of the diegesis which is typically brought about by narrative (and by constitution of character).

As soon as this loft appears on the screen, with the roofs of trucks passing by outside those windows, generating what appears, at least, to be synch sound, institutionally determined expectations are such that it can only be perceived as waiting for something to happen, for *someone* to come in (such is the anthropocentric bias of the classical film). But the diegetic process as such is already fully engaged. Subsequently, someone does come in, the diegesis appears centred, in preparation for the appearance of recognizable narrative structures. Clearly, we are dealing with a perfectly coded succession, considerably more protracted than is usual, but that is all. Of course, as the film proceeds and as such expectations are not met, these normal images, when they reappear now and again, may have lost some of their credibility. Comparisons are difficult, since an acoustic sine wave soon begins to blot out the live sound—but perhaps this disruptive wail merely manifests our inevitable loss of faith through repeated depredations. Nonetheless, when the woman finds the dead body—at the climax of the film's elementary narrative—full diegetic strength returns behind the sine wave, in much the same way that it seems to have hitherto been maintained through thick and thin 'out there', beyond the windows.

Consequently, it would seem, first, that even in the absence of narrative, even in the absence of images of humans or animals, the diegetic presence can be maintained through this or that essential component (here it is movement—however slow, it is enough to over-determine camera identification—and synch sound that connote liveness for any audience). At the same time, it would also appear that analogical, pro-filmic movement and narrative tend to preserve the diegetic process absolutely intact even when the 'representational integrity' of the picture and/or sound-track are under attack.

In fact, the film whose non-verbal title ($\longleftrightarrow$) is rendered as *Back and Forth*, shows how much obliteration the picture track can take before the diegetic process is so much as impinged upon.¹⁶ It is not until the camera, swinging back and forth across that occasionally peopled classroom, attains a speed so high that the picture is no longer recognizably representational at all, and until the sound of the swinging camera-boom has become a mechanical screech that blots out all ambient sound, that we can speak of a momentary suspension of diegetic process.

Another limit-instance in the relations between narrative and diegetic process is revealed in *A Casing Shelved*, a single-slide and tape piece designed to be presented and attended to in conditions so similar to those of the motion picture that it can, as Annette Michelson has pointed out¹⁷, be legitimately assimilated to Snow's work as a film-maker. A single still image is projected on a screen for nearly an hour. It shows a set of homemade shelves lined with dozens of objects belonging to the artist. The work's narrative is carried solely by Snow's own voice on tape, telling the story behind each of those objects in turn. It is hard not to be reminded of the primitive lecturer deciphering an image which was no doubt often incomprehensible to the gaze of the neophyte moviegoer. But the tenuousness of the visual guarantees, and in particular the

¹⁶ Which is no doubt why recent deconstructive practices involving the laying of computer-produced patterns over otherwise conventional narrative sequences appear to me naive.

¹⁷ Annette Michelson, 'Towards Snow, Part I', *Artforum*, June 1971, pp 30-37.

absence of movement – even those of the dust particles that would betray the movement of a film – as well as the lack of spatio-temporal indices in the spoken commentary, make it very difficult to speak of a diegetic process or effect in connection with this piece, nonetheless saturated with narrativity.

Yet, however much these works by Snow may test certain outer limits of diegesis and narrative, another film makes it possible to isolate in exemplary fashion these two dimensions of cinematic representation, and perhaps better to understand as well the specificity of the diegetic effect and of primal identification with the camera. The Scottish physician-cum-poet-cum-film-maker Margaret Tait's beautiful film, *Place of Work*, can be said to constitute an experiment in the maximization of the diegetic effect in the almost total absence of narrativity. The film is simply an exploration/meditation dealing with a house which, as the author announces briefly at the outset, she and her family are about to leave after many years spent living and working there. But although a ditch-digger may be glimpsed out on the road beyond the hedge, people are largely absent from the screen, as pans and fixed shots of the house and its garden follow one another in impressionistic order. The sound of the film, though not actually recorded synch, it appears, was edited and mixed to produce a perfect illusion of the live. The result, then, of these camera movements and of this sound, is a perfectly full sense of *being there*: the stage is set, once again, for 'people' (characters) to make their entrance.

The diegetic effect in the absence of narrative: *Place of Work*.



Interestingly enough, however, the single moment of narrative emergence – an abortive emergence, at that – involves not humans but animals. During a series of garden views, a shot of a cat is followed by one of a bird. Nothing actually transpires, except for this imaginary transmission

of a gaze: Tait's camera (and scissors) move on to other views. And yet any attentive audience, within the appropriate cultural and historical confines, will grasp, as soon as the bird appears, that this shot-change is potentially the first articulation in a tri-partite narrative sequence: cat/ sees bird/ chases (kills? eats?) bird.

It is also interesting to note that the only centred appearance of a human being in the film (the ditch-digger is part of the scenery), not only fails to introduce narrative at all, but actually challenges the very identificational system upon which the maximized diegetic effect rests. At one point, as the camera explores the ground floor, it focuses on the open front door. A postman steps into view, withdraws again quickly when he sees the camera pointed at him. Tait's voice calls to him, telling him to come ahead, that it's all right, and he reappears to exchange a few words with the woman behind the camera. Here, I feel, is a momentary impingement upon the conditions of diegetic production as they have been established in this film. For at the point when Tait's voice calls out, we suddenly find that our position at the camera key-hole has been occupied. It seems there was someone there before us, or rather, someone is suddenly peering over our shoulder, urging us out of the way, as it were.

In these two moments, then, the film suggests, first, the boundary between the narrative and diegetic processes, and, second, between an illusionistic diegesis and one which acknowledges its process of production.

The Diegesis of Television

It has often been argued, in rebuttal of my attempts to define an *Institutional Mode of Representation*, essentially unchanged I claim, since its emergence in the late '20s, and to theorize the visual and audio strategies which converged around that period to produce the full diegetic effect, that 'television has changed all that'. Before my recent stay in the USA and the massive exposure to TV in the North American style that I received there, I had seen no conclusive evidence of any fundamental differences between cinema and television in this respect. Today, having observed the way in which Americans relate to a television which runs 24 hours a day and whose chief function may be said to be the trivialization of everything, having observed the converging strategies of disengagement which have been built into the new medium as they have been into North American society as a whole, I have to admit that I was wrong.

It is strange to see the many ways in which United States network television constitutes a return to the days of the nickelodeon: a continuous showing cut up into brief segments of from one to ten minutes, with an audience that drifts in and out, the incredible mixture of genres, the confusions between reality and fiction to which audiences are subjected – and seem so readily prone. Even *découpage* seems to be slipping back to 1910 in the proliferating evening sit-coms, with a prevalence of three-

walled frontality and the medium long-shot. The use of off-screen laughter in these same shows seems clearly to be a way of situating the audience in a noisy theatre; but vicariously so, 'theatre' here being tantamount to *unreal*, not to be taken seriously. And this indeed is what so universally characterizes United States TV today: none of it matters, not the news any more than the soaps, not the election campaigns any more than the ads (which often have built-in elements of self-derision that seem to say 'even these', presumably the true *raison d'être* of commercial TV, 'are not to be taken seriously'). There has even been one astounding return to an undercutting lecture in the true spirit of the late nickelodeon period: the adventures of the stunt-driving *Dukes of Hazzard* are punctuated by an ironic, chortling, home-spun narration which unerringly de-dramatizes every situation!

For years we have assumed that the alienation effect was necessarily enlightening, liberating, that anything which undercut the empathetic power of the diegetic process was progressive. To be reminded that the scenes unfolding on stage or screen were artifice, to experience any mode of distancing was to be enabled to reflect upon a text and its production of meaning, etc. etc. It is beginning to appear to me today that United States television, more advanced in this respect than any other, save perhaps that of Japan, mobilizes a number of strategies whose cumulative effect is to induce a certain disengagement, a certain feeling that what we see – *no matter what it is* – does not really count. Distancing, in short, has been co-opted.

The contrast is striking with the type of engagement elicited by the classical cinema of the '30s, '40s and '50s and indeed by most Hollywood films today (though not all: the Burt Reynolds type of CB film, with the bouncy music that trivializes all those car-wrecks – as it does the bloody slaughter in the Eastwood Dirty Harry films – and with their completely imaginary narrative topology, is only one example of a feed-back effect from TV to classical film).

It would take many pages to outline the countless distancing effects to be found on United States television, from the omni-present star-filter, as at home on the talk-show or the newscast as it is in the variety show; to the very format of those obscurantist magazines – *That's Incredible*, *Real People*, etc – which joyfully mingle file-tapes (dutifully labeled as such), re-enactments (by the real-life protagonists of some 'strange event'), *cinéma-vérité* type interviews, studio presentations, as well as 'documents' varying considerably in status from the obvious fake (of telekinesis, for example) to the incontrovertible actuality. These distancing shifts in the status of representation, which at first glance ought to make a Godard green with envy, are in fact part of a brilliant strategy of disengagement, designed to place everything on the same plane of triviality, which is the general undertaking of United States television.

However, the primary strategy of undercutting the diegetic process on US network television is the constant interruption through commercials, a kind of pro-filmic pendant of the plethora of accepted live interruptions peculiar, in my view, to the North American household's relation

to their TV set. (It is extremely rare, for example, that callers will be asked to ring back, even if the person receiving the call is watching TV – at least in my experience, and that of my friends.) And there is good reason to believe that the sluggish pace and pedantic repetitiveness of the day-time soaps is designed to mesh with the rhythm of housework.

By contra-distinction, one is tempted to feel that the uninterrupted duration of diegetic production over a period of an hour or two might well be an essential element in that maximization of the diegetic effect which we associate with the classical film. Here too, the period 1906 to 1914 is crucial, not only in laying the grounds for institutional editing, but also in the shift in programme format from a series of six-to-ten minute shorts with songs or lantern-slides between each, to one centred around a film well over an hour long.

The cool, disjunctive format of United States network TV may be seen as a veritable turning back of the clock, which is anything but innocent. 'Cinema' returns to a quasi pre-discursive state, abandoning the absorbing presence of the full diegetic process – which after all did elicit some kind of emotional, intellectual and perhaps even ideological involvement on the part of the spectator – in favour of a sort of bland detachment (clinically observed to be close to a state of narcosis or hypnosis)¹⁸ in which the repression in El Salvador is no more nor less involving than *The Price is Right*, and in which even the most outspoken (fictional) denunciation of, say, migrant workers' camps in Florida, will be taken with the same bemused incredulity as the exploits of *That's Incredible*. Faced with these developments, the left ideologue can no longer regard the classical film with its maximized diegetic effect simply as 'bad object'. I, for one, would henceforth argue that: (a) the dissolution of the diegetic effect must be carefully controlled in any audio-visual signifying practice with radical pretensions; and (b) the strong diegetic effect (in particular through recourse to the codes of 'liveness') must in some way or another remain a part of any such practice.

¹⁸ cf Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, Morrow Quill, New York 1978, pp 192-215.

A methodological note: clearly there is some presumption in measuring degrees of diegetic intensity merely on the grounds of what I take to be the response of the 'average' viewer of the classical motion picture film. My only excuse for this is that I have a long experience as a film-maker and particularly at the editing table, where the very essence of success is the ability to hold a totally schizophrenic view towards the material one is editing. One must be able to look at it, and the effects which one is achieving with it, both from the (inevitable) point of view of one who knows it by heart, and from the artificially constructed point of view of a viewer seeing the effects for the first and only time. It is for this reason that I feel that I, along with most trained professional film-makers, am qualified to judge such a phenomenon as diegetic impact, since over and over we must live the experience of the 'average' viewer (a construct, of course, but one which proves its efficacy time and again within the confines of a given period and a given culture). Furthermore, we must live it from both within and *without*, constantly analysing its parameters, dosing its components in order, most often, precisely to maximize it. This *collective* experience – for it is that of the film-making community – upon which I draw has, I firmly believe, some validating weight, enough perhaps to offset the well-known disadvantages of empiricism.

SOVIET CINEMA: MAKING SENSE OF SOUND

A REVISED HISTORIOGRAPHY BY IAN CHRISTIE

¹ C A Lejeune, *Cinema*, Alexander Maclehose, London, 1931, p 167.

² John Grierson, 'Summary and Survey: 1935' in *Grierson on Documentary*, ed Forsyth Hardy, Faber, London, 1966, p 182. The ambiguities of Grierson's position on Soviet cinema (as on much else) remain to be fully explored. In this article and elsewhere he slips between admiration for 'exciting cinema' and contempt for the 'airs and ribbons of art' that have distracted Soviet film-makers from 'coming to grips' with the issues around them.

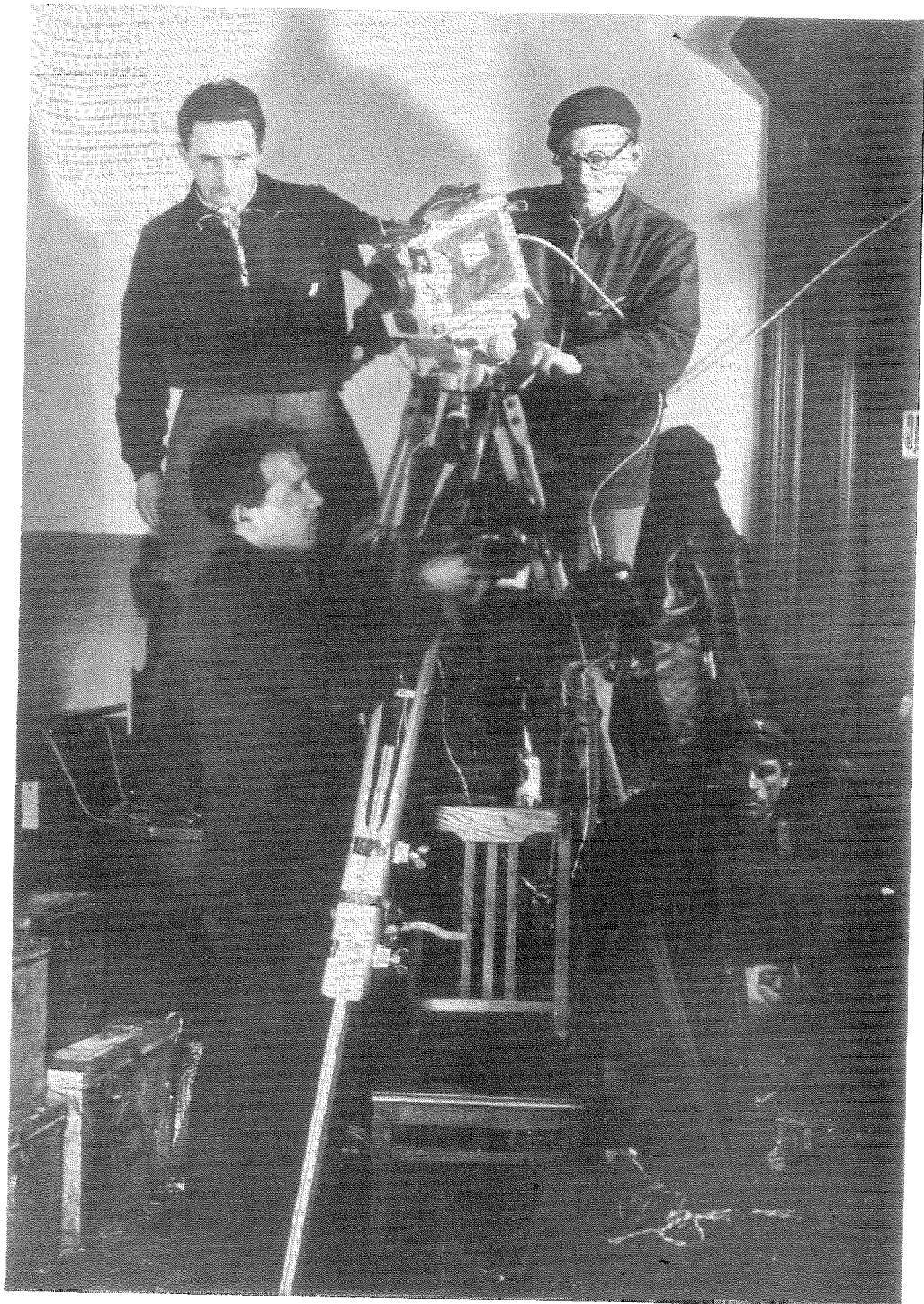
³ André Bazin, 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema' in *What is Cinema?*, University of California Press, 1967.

It is one of the movies' little ironies that the most important development in film-making – the revolutionary work of the Soviet cinema – should have taken place at the precise moment when the coming of sound made it temporarily invalid; that the one theory which might have saved the silent cinema from destruction arrived just as the silent cinema had drawn its last breath.

C A Lejeune¹

THE WORLDWIDE IMPACT of early Soviet cinema from 1926-30 was so great that it opened, quite literally, a new chapter in world cinema history, but a chapter that demanded to be written quite differently from all others. The first films of Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Kuleshov to be seen abroad claimed – and won – recognition on the grounds of their essential *difference* from all other films, whether the difference was perceived in stylistic, political or psychological terms. But despite this universal acclaim, the reputation of Soviet cinema was soon to prove vulnerable. One theme which emerged in the early '30s was a reaction against the extreme enthusiasm of the early period of 'discovery', no doubt linked with the political disillusion of the period. A typical response was that of Grierson, who had been closely involved in launching *Potemkin* in New York in 1926 and urging Soviet techniques as models for the emergent documentary movement in Britain, yet who, by 1935, found it 'remarkable how, after the first flush of exciting cinema, the Russian talent faded'.² As the Griersonian 'theory of decline' took hold abroad, a second threat became evident at home: the heroic achievements of the montage period petrified into a conventional monument to the theory and experiment of the early 'pioneers'.

Subsequent developments in both Soviet and non-Soviet cinema historiography have tended to confirm this latter tendency. Bazin's opposition between 'image' and 'reality' in silent cinema has exercised a persuasive influence on several generations, discrediting the 'manipulation' and 'trickery' of montage and expressionist cinema, and thus further ensuring the relegation of montage to the museum.³ Soviet cinema historians, on the other hand, have tried to reconcile the evident contradiction between '20s montage cinema and the approved models of '30s 'realism', tacitly acknowledging the worldwide reputation of the former at the expense of the latter. Even recent 'revisionist' work –



Dziga Vertov (top left) making one of the earliest full-length Soviet 'direct sound' films, *Enthusiasm*.

⁴ As Peter Wollen termed it in the discussion following his paper 'Cinema and Technology: A Historical Overview' in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, ed Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath, Macmillan, 1980.

⁵ Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'On the Writing of the History of Cinema: Some Problems', *Edinburgh '77 Magazine*, p 11.

⁶ See Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer*, Scholar Press, London, 1979, Ch 14. Burch makes a case for regarding the five years after the commercial introduction of sound in 1927 as a 'Golden Age' for European cinema.

⁷ See, for instance, David Robinson, *World Cinema: A Short History*, Eyre Methuen, 1973, p 175. Other 'short histories', such as Gerald Mast's (Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), omit even this cursory remark on the introduction of sound.

whether supporting Vertov's ultra-radical montage position, or challenging the 'tyranny' of montage – has tended to accept as given the heroic mythology of montage and to ignore the challenge, or the 'catastrophe',⁴ of the coming of sound.

Looking at the frozen legacy of early Soviet cinema, inscribed alike in conventional and radical histories, the absence of any sustained treatment of the long transition to sound is striking. It is as if the brute industrial fact of sound, with its attendant aesthetic and ideological implications, constitutes too great a *disturbance* for narrative history, or indeed montage theory. Yet the introduction of sound coincides with and helps to define the turning point in Soviet cinema. It is an example *par excellence* of the generally ignored intersection between the specificity of cinema and the histories – economic, technological, political, ideological – that determine and are in turn determined by it.⁵ Soviet sound cinema is effectively a 'new apparatus' by the late '30s and the investigation of its emergence as a domestic mass medium out of the pluralist 'international' cinema of the late '20s increasingly seems a priority, in order to 'unblock' the wider study of Soviet cinema and indeed the history of world cinema.

The Threat of the Talkies

The introduction of sound to Soviet cinema had two distinctive, perhaps unique, features. First, because the rapid culmination of sound technology development in Europe and the United States coincided with the end of the New Economic Policy and a new drive towards self-sufficiency in the USSR, there was a long phase of rumour and speculation – to which the celebrated Statement by Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov belongs – before indigenous sound production finally started in 1930. Second, even when production was under way, sound and silent cinema continued to co-exist for nearly six years – a length of transition only exceeded in Japan.⁶ Received opinion concludes that these delays were wholly beneficial, allowing Soviet directors to avoid the 'mistakes made elsewhere' and to tackle sound production with confidence.⁷ But a closer reading of even the few documents available suggests other considerations. The following extract from the memoirs of Yevgeni Gabrilovich, a veteran screenwriter, usefully summarises the concerns of the wider community of Soviet film-makers on the eve of sound and vividly evokes their response:

What subjects there were to discuss in those far-off days! How should one depict the positive hero – simply positive, or with some human flaw? May the heroine of a film be pretty, or is that a concession to bourgeois taste? What is optimism and what pessimism? In what lies decadence and in what heroism? How to vanquish formalism? How should satire be made an affirmation of life? How should one react to the evident lack of political culture of certain young masters of cinema who take themselves much too seriously? Does the

worker class need fiction films or documentaries? With or without a story? With or without a personal drama? What best accentuates the heroism of the masses – everyday heroism or monumental romanticism?

But the essential question, which brought bitterness, passion, despair to these discussions, was the problem of sound films. Those who only know sound cinema cannot imagine the panic which struck writers, directors, actors, cameramen and editors that moment when, quite unexpectedly, the cinema screen gave forth sounds. Documents in the archives, the stenograms and articles of the period are only a pale and fleeting reflection of all the emotion, the worry, the panic. For it was all the poetry of film art, believed to be of its essence mute, that was in the balance and threatened with extinction.⁸

The industrial upheaval recalled here is already familiar from the American experience; and equally familiar is the apparently genuine fear that sound would in some sense destroy the 'essence' of film art.

What was the reason for this evidently widespread fear? Most aesthetic discussions of sound in the '30s come down to the unhelpful assertion that since film is *essentially* visual and *therefore* silent, sound will inevitably distract from its artistry. But a more interesting perspective is outlined by Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler in their book on film music,⁹ where they trace the origin of accompanying music for films to a need to still the unconscious fear of silent moving images that disturbed early cinema audiences. From this premise, they argue that music has an equally important function in sound cinema, since the 'immateriality' of quasi-realistic speech is equally disturbing in relation to two-dimensional images. Thus, dialogue in the talkie is the direct successor of the silent cinema's intertitles and both of these instances of language offend against the basic 'discovery' of cinema, which is the representation of movement. The fundamental divergence between speech and image is noted unconsciously by the spectator, hence the need for music in sound films to 'set in motion' and 'justify' the essential dimension of movement, which speech would otherwise inhibit, and to preserve the 'fragile' representation of the external world offered by the sound film.¹⁰ Adorno and Eisler's theory suggests a possible explanation for the deep-seated fear of sound that went beyond immediate industrial consequences: it identifies the threat of a de-stabilisation of the institution which had grown up during the silent period, in which the mere presence of music played a crucial *binding* (rather than expressive) role.

But there was another consideration that may have seemed more pressing to the Soviet montage school. The late '20s had seen a remarkable convergence of theoretical and practical work around the concept of montage, which went beyond such film-maker theorists as Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Kuleshov (each with their own versions of montage) to include writers, literary theorists, visual artists, theatre workers and others.¹¹ Montage had become a key concept in many fields after its initial development as a theory of the specificity of film; and with it was linked another key concept, that of 'inner speech'. The origins of this

⁸ Yevgeni Gabrilovich, 'Adventures and Encounters of a Scenarist' in *Cinema in Revolution*, ed Luda and Jean Schnitzer, Marcel Martin, 1966; trans and ed David Robinson, Secker & Warburg, 1973, pp 168-9.

⁹ Originally published in translation as *Composing for the Films*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1947, and signed by Eisler alone. The revised 'original' version, signed by both authors, appeared in West Germany in 1969; I have used the French translation of this, *Musique de cinéma*, trans Jean-Pierre Hammer, L'Arche Editeur, Paris, 1972, Ch 5.

¹⁰ Adorno and Eisler, *ibid*, pp 85-6.

¹¹ There is evidence of an inter-disciplinary group which met in the early '30s to discuss topics such as 'inner speech'. See Harvey Denkin, 'Linguistic Models in Early Soviet Cinema', *Cinema Journal* vol 17 no 1, Fall 1977, note 11, referring to research by Annette Michelson.

¹² Paul Willemen has extended his original discussion of 'inner speech', 'Reflections on Eikhenbaum's Concept of Internal Speech in the Cinema', *Screen* Winter 1974/5, vol 15 no 4, pp 57-79, in a recent article, 'Cinematic Discourse - The Problem of Inner Speech', *Screen* vol 22 no 3 (1981).

¹³ Boris Eikhenbaum, 'Problems of Film Stylistics', trans Thomas Aman, *Screen*, Autumn 1974, vol 15 no 3, pp 7-32; originally published in a collection *Poetika Kino* (Poetics of Cinema), Moscow-Leningrad, 1927, with contributions by other Formalist critics. A complete translation of *Poetika Kino* is now available as No 9 in the *Russian Poetics in Translation* series, July 1982.

¹⁴ Eikhenbaum, op cit, p 14.

¹⁵ *ibid*, p 30.

¹⁶ Sergei Eisenstein, 'A Course in Treatment', in *Film Form*, ed and trans Jay Leyda, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, 1949, p 106.

¹⁷ Eikhenbaum, op cit, p 16.

notion may have been in Stanislavsky's interest in 'inner monologue' or in Piaget's study of language acquisition,¹² but by the mid-'20s it had become a central feature of 'formalist' critical theory and played an important part in Eikhenbaum's seminal essay on the poetics of cinema, 'Problems of Film Stylistics'.¹³ For Eikhenbaum, montage is the rationalisation of the basic laws of film construction, controlling the viewers' 'sense of time'; and montage relies upon – and to some extent produces – a constant subjective 'accompaniment' to the experience of film viewing:

*For the study of the laws of film (especially of montage) it is most important to admit that perception and understanding of a motion picture are inextricably bound up with the development of internal speech, which makes the connection between separate shots. Outside this process only the 'trans-sense' elements of film can be perceived.*¹⁴

If 'inner speech' provides the guarantee of film intelligibility, it is also the basis on which filmic metaphor and other rhetorical structures depend. According to Eikhenbaum, 'film metaphor is entirely dependent on verbal metaphor... A film metaphor is a kind of visual realisation of a verbal metaphor'.¹⁵ Clearly such speculation was of prime importance to Eisenstein in the development of his conception of 'intellectual cinema' and many of the montage 'tropes' of *October* and *The General Line* can only be interpreted according to the 'inner speech' hypothesis. By 1932, he had reached

*the theoretically long foreseen 'last word' on montage form in general. That the montage form, as structure, is a reconstruction of the laws of the thought process.*¹⁶

Leaving aside Eisenstein's hopes for sound as a 'new montage element', if the whole edifice of montage was believed to rely upon the institutionalised activation of inner speech, then the 'outer speech' of the talkie posed obvious danger. Not in terms of a 'visual' art threatened by language, but of the plasticity and allusiveness of inner speech suppressed by the standardisation of everyday audible speech. What Eikhenbaum had termed 'the intimate process of forming internal speech',¹⁷ interrupted hitherto only by the demands of reading intertitles, was to be replaced by a pre-formed, externalised address *from* the screen which would make the spectator little more than a passive eavesdropper. What was at stake in the sound revolution, for the montage school, was nothing less than the underlying principle of montage itself, the poetic interplay of inner speech and montage figures, the participation of the spectator as actor.

The Statement on sound signed by Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov¹⁸ needs to be read against the background of anxious speculation that preceded actual experience of sound in the Soviet Union, if only because it is a deeply ambivalent text. Although generally interpreted as a cautious acceptance of sound, it can equally be read as an ingenious rejection of the basic, *un*acceptable discovery of the talkie, synchronised speech – which, it should be remembered, was not Hollywood's original aim in developing sound reproduction. More precisely, the overall strategy of the Statement is to mount a tactical defence of montage by conceding certain criticisms, while seeking to relocate the inner speech/montage relationship within the new ensemble of sound cinema.

The Statement claims that montage is 'the indisputable axiom upon which world cinema culture rests'.¹⁹ From this point of view:

Sound is a double-edged invention and its most probable application will be along the line of least resistance, i.e. in the field of the satisfaction of simple curiosity.

As a result of such innocent demonstrations of 'the "illusion" of people talking, objects producing noises, etc' there is the likelihood of an institutionalised theatrical phase, characterised by 'dramas of high culture'. At first sight, this prediction seems close to what actually happened as Hollywood turned to Broadway for its actors and ready-made scripts, but in fact it had a particular and rather different meaning in the Soviet context. Ever since the pre-revolutionary period, there had been an intense struggle between partisans of theatre and cinema over the autonomy and specificity of the latter.²⁰ After the revolution the debate continued and became even more complex, with Meyerhold, who had proclaimed the 'cinefication of the theatre', and former theatre experimentalists such as Eisenstein and the FEKS group, ranged against the Moscow Art Theatre and supporters of the non-montage and 'theatrical' cinema.²¹ But the main thrust of the argument is that sound used naturalistically would, quite simply, 'destroy the culture of montage' by substituting a linear, narrative syntax for the dialectical and disjunctive syntax of montage.

Then the proposal:

Only the contrapuntal use of sound vis-à-vis the visual fragment of montage will open up new possibilities for the development and perfection of montage.

The first practical work with sound should aim at a sharp contrast with the visual images. Only such a 'hammer and tongs' approach will produce the necessary sensation that will result eventually in the creation of a new orchestral counterpoint of visual and aural images.

¹⁸ Although it is generally assumed that Eisenstein was the guiding figure behind the *Statement*, Alexandrov claimed in a 1965 interview that he had been asked by the other signatories to 'draw up the substance of our conversations', 'Working with Eisenstein', in *Cinema in Revolution*, op cit.

¹⁹ The translation of the *Statement* quoted here and below is a new draft for a forthcoming collection, *The Film Factory: Soviet Cinema in Documents 1917-36* ed Ian Christie and Richard Taylor.

²⁰ See e.g. texts by Mayakovsky, 'The Destruction of "Theatre" by the Cinema as a Sign of the Resurrection of Theatrical Art', 'The Relationship Between Contemporary Theatre and Cinema and Art', trans Richard Taylor, *Framework* 18, 1982.

²¹ A section of *The Film Factory* will document the post-revolutionary phase of this debate.

²² Kristin Thompson, 'Early Sound Counterpoint', *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980).

²³ Willemen, 'Cinematic Discourse', op cit, p 66.

²⁴ Sergei Gerasimov, Interview Paris 1964, in *Cinema in Revolution*, op cit, p 117.

²⁵ Anatoli Golovnya, Interview Moscow 1965, in *Cinema in Revolution*, op cit, p 139.

²⁶ V I Pudovkin, 'K voprosu zvukovogo nachala v filme', *Kino i kultura*, 1929, no 5/6, trans Richard Taylor, *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema 1917-1929*, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p 143.

²⁷ Eisenstein, 'A Course in Treatment', op cit, p 106.

²⁸ Taylor's new translation of the Statement corrects several errors in the available version: here 'long shots' ('*obshehie plany*') in place of Leyda's 'close-ups'.

How elementary work on disjunctive sound/image relationships might develop to the stage of 'orchestral counterpoint' is not explained and has received little attention until recently, doubtless because there was so little evidence of it in early Soviet sound cinema. However, Kristin Thompson has surveyed a group of early sound films for instances of counterpoint and, not surprisingly, finds more traces than might have been expected from a reading of conventional histories.²² Unfortunately the value of this analysis is severely limited by its narrow, formalist terms of reference. Taking the proposal of the Statement at face value, 'counterpoint' is projected into the sound period in a classic example of what Paul Willemen has termed the 'audio-visual phantasy', whereby 'all relations between the two blocks [sound and vision] become entirely external, formal, optional and ultimately dispensable'.²³ Thus Thompson drastically simplifies the political and theoretical upheaval of the transition period, while dismissing such remarkable films as *The Great Consoler* and *Three Songs of Lenin* as 'close to Hollywood' or 'playing safe', because they do not rely on highly disjunctive sound/image relations. Predictably, she finds Kozintsev and Trauberg's *Alone* the most interesting specimen, without mentioning that it was in fact shot as a silent film and experimentally post-synchronised very much under the influence of the Statement!²⁴ Above all, the problem of *spoken language* – symptomatically treated in the Statement as a 'limitation' – is simply ignored. Such serious weaknesses in what is nonetheless a pioneering study underline the 'blockage' in studies of both Soviet cinema and the re-structuring impact of sound.

Given the lack of any significant sequel to the Statement's call for counterpoint, it seems possible that this was little more than a tentative, theoretical move in defence of montage – an estimate supported by Pudovkin's collaborator Anatoli Golovnya, who attributed it to 'imperfect knowledge of sound films'. Golovnya's claim that, when Pudovkin 'had been able to digest the technique and prospects of sound, it was quite clear that the ideas expounded in the [Statement] had no lasting significance for him,'²⁵ is less plausible. This ignores Pudovkin's almost unique experiments in counterpoint and 'asynchrony', both in his delayed first sound film *Deserter* (1933) and in its predecessor, *A Simple Case*, originally planned as a sound film, although released silent, and still showing signs of his somewhat doctrinaire attempt to use sound, 'evoking definite and exact association', as a basis for non-diegetic 'visual impressions'.²⁶ Eisenstein, on the other hand, appears to have moved on rapidly from the Statement programme, with its avoidance of speech, to a characteristically ingenious (if implausible) position, influenced by his meeting with Joyce in Paris and based directly upon 'the syntax of inner speech as distinct from outer speech':

*how obvious it becomes that the material of the sound-film is not dialogue. The true material of the sound-film is, of course, the monologue.*²⁷

The following section of the Statement has received less attention,

although it amounts to an admission that montage has reached an impasse. Sound used contrapuntally is seen as 'an organic way out for the cinema's cultural avant-garde from a whole series of blind alleys which have seemed inescapable'. Two specific examples are given: the intractable problem of integrating intertitles into montage structures and the disruptive need for explanatory sequences, such as long-shots,²⁸ in montage sequences consisting for the most part of rapidly-edited close-ups. The latter problem was perhaps more Pudovkin's than Eisenstein's. Noël Burch has drawn attention to the ultimate paradox in Pudovkin's method of analysis into the simplest and most expressive montage elements, i.e. by close-ups:

*Wishing to carry to its extreme consequences the logic of linearisation through editing, Pudovkin comes up against the same obstacle encountered by the pioneers when they were casting about for methods capable of overcoming the unfortunate 'dissociative' effect which the first interpolated close-ups had upon the unity of films that still depended almost exclusively on the lay-out of the primitive tableau. In both cases this disintegration, as it were, was the price that had to be paid for an increase in 'expressiveness'... Striving to remain within the bounds of fundamental linearity and to strengthen that linearity, Pudovkin fails to see that the enunciation characteristic of the system is not simply a succession of signs, as decomposed as possible, but that it is founded on a dialectic between such 'stripped down' images and a more complex spatiality offering complementary guarantees.*²⁹

Burch's general argument is that early Soviet cinema owed its pluralism and originality to the 'unfinished' representational system which it inherited. The Statement suggests that this phase had run its course, at least for the director who had just finished *October* and returned to work on *The General Line*:

Every day the problems of theme and plot grow more complex; attempts to solve them by concepts of purely 'visual' montage either lead to insoluble problems or involve the director in fantastic montage construction, evoking the fear of abstruseness and reactionary decadence.

It is well known that Eisenstein was already looking forward to sound as a 'new montage element' while working on *The General Line*, which he also considered turning into a sound film with music by Meise³⁰; but the Statement here suggests a crisis in confidence in the 'intellectual cinema' toward which *October* pointed.

The Statement ends with a further, prophetic, argument against the talkies. Only contrapuntal sound films will escape the inevitable restriction of naturalistic sound films to their own language communities. The authors of the Statement foresaw what was soon to happen as the 'internationalism' of silent cinema – which made the United States as open to European³¹ and even Soviet films³² as Europe and the USSR were to

²⁹ Noël Burch, 'Film's Institutional Mode of Representation and the Soviet Response', *October* 11, Winter 1979, pp 87-8.

³⁰ According to Yon Barna, *Eisenstein*, Secker & Warburg, 1973, p 134.

³¹ Alexander Walker records in *The Shattered Silents*, Elm Tree Books, London, 1978, p 198, the high proportion of European films and actors which were playing in New York at the beginning of the sound era. By 1930 almost all foreign films had disappeared from mainstream American cinemas.

³² Vladimir Petric has analysed in detail the pattern of Soviet films entering US distribution from 1926-35. The total imported by 1936 was 184 titles, of which 91 were silent and 93 sound. Petric records the verdict of their US importer, Amkino, on its liquidation in 1940: 'Soviet talkies have always been less popular than Soviet silent films'. *Soviet Revolutionary Films in America*, NYU Ph D thesis, 1973 (unpublished).

³³ For details of Soviet dependence on imported American films in the mid-'20s, see Taylor *op cit* pp 94-6.

³⁴ There is a summary of this in Georges Sadoul, *Dziga Vertov*, Editions Champ Libre, Paris, 1971.

³⁵ Dziga Vertov, 'Articles, journaux, projets', *Cahiers du cinéma* 10:18, Paris, 1972, trans into French Sylviane Mosse, Andrée Robel (my translation into English), pp 149-50.

³⁶ 'First Steps', *Kino*, 16 April 1931, trans into French, 'Articles, journaux, projets', *op cit*, pp 156-60.

American films³³—turned to one-way traffic from the United States to the rest of the world. After a brief phase of dual and multi-language production in Europe, foreign-language films met increasing resistance in the United States, while American films continued to increase their penetration of foreign markets, generally in dubbed versions. For the still-young Soviet cinema, which had achieved an extraordinary international prestige in the late '20s, and corresponding domestic privilege, this was perhaps the most serious long-term threat posed by sound. As the debate around 'Socialism in one country' was resolved in Stalin's favour, so the international propaganda role of Soviet cinema dwindled in importance to the point where, by the end of Eisenstein's visit to the United States, foreign travel and contacts were beginning to be regarded as dangerous cosmopolitanism.

Vertov: Enthusiasm for Sound

Before considering the profound upheaval in Soviet life which was the background to the introduction of sound, the views of Vertov on sound are worth noting, especially since they directly challenged those of the Statement and in fact closely—if briefly—matched the new mood of the 'construction' period. Vertov had already anticipated the potential of sound reproduction as a mass medium with his film *Radio Kino Pravda* (1925) and manifesto 'From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye' (1926).³⁴ As early as 1923 he foresaw 'radio newsreels' linked with film newsreels and, with his background in Futurist 'noise music' experiments, he experimented more fully than any of his contemporaries with 'implied' sound through sequences of sound-related images in, for example, *Stride, Soviet* (1926). Later, in 1930, when he was making one of the earliest full-length Soviet 'direct sound' films, *Enthusiasm*, he commented obliquely on the Statement in a question and answer article for the magazine *Kino-Front*:

The declaration on the necessity of non-correspondence between visible and audible scenes, like those others on the necessity to make only natural sound or talking films, seems to me—if you will pardon the expression—not worth tuppence. In the sound cinema, as in silent cinema, there are only two kinds of film to be rigorously distinguished; documentaries (with dialogue, authentic sound, etc) and played films (with dialogue, artificial sound specially created during shooting, etc).

*Neither correspondence nor non-correspondence of the visible and the audible is obligatory, either for documentaries or played films. Sound images and silent images are edited according to identical principles; their montage may make them correspond or not, or mix different forms of combination. The important thing is to end this stupid categorisation into talking, noise or sound films.*³⁵

Vertov's statement, of course, was made after the period of anticipation and at the beginning of actual sound production and it challenges not only the Statement but other widely held views of the period. In a later

article³⁶, after the release of *Enthusiasm*, he described the film as a 'negation of the negation' proposed by the critic Sokolov, who had claimed that neither nature nor everyday life were 'sonogenic' and that efforts to record natural sounds would result in a 'concert of caterwauling'.³⁷

For Vertov and his group what is of most interest is a 'multilateral' analysis of the film, not as a 'work in itself', but as a part of 'the work which we have undertaken to help the cinema pass from the rails of silence onto the rails of sound in our branch of the socialist film industry'.³⁸ While Vertov boldly seized the opportunity to link his polemic for documentary with the new technology, Eisenstein chose to travel abroad – ostensibly to study sound techniques – and, as Ivor Montagu notes³⁹, other film-makers, less famous or more fearful, devised long-term projects to help them weather the coming storm.

Industrial and Cultural Revolution

Recent studies of the introduction of sound in Hollywood have stressed the economic imperatives at work in what had hitherto been regarded as a technological and aesthetic process. In the Soviet case, an even greater range of processes are implicated in assessing the transition to sound. As a preliminary to the detailed analysis of this transformation,⁴⁰ the following main elements may be sketched.

The essential dynamic of the late '20s in the USSR was the accelerating development of a 'command economy' which would eventually bring all areas of Soviet work and life under centralised authority, eliminating independent initiatives and concentrating resources behind imposed policies. This dynamic took the form of preparation for and implementation of the first Five Year Plan in 1928/29,⁴¹ with its central theme of industrialization and, superimposed upon this, without warning, Stalin's forced collectivization of agriculture. A 'cultural revolution' was planned to accompany the Five Year Plan and preparations for this ran in parallel through 1927-8 with work on the Plan. Richard Taylor has already charted in detail the intense debate that surrounded the First All-Union Party Conference on the Cinema in March 1928,⁴² but the essential issues at stake were close Party control of the cinema and the development of the cinema as an efficient mass medium. When the Party finally succeeded in establishing controls in 1930, with the reorganisation of all cinema affairs under Soyuzkino, headed by Boris Shumyatsky, Soviet film-makers and administrators had, for the first time, an authoritative – if ultimately contradictory – brief:

*In the period of socialist construction the cinema should be the most powerful weapon for the deepening of the class-consciousness of the workers, for the political re-education of all the non-proletarian strata of the population, and above all the peasantry.*⁴³

Ivor Montagu has suggested that the centralisation and rigidity of the Five Year Plan may in fact have delayed the introduction of sound to the cinema,⁴⁴ but a crucial link was forged in 1930 between the new technol-

³⁷ Ippolit Sokolov, 'The Possibilities of the Sound Film', *Kino*, 1929, no 45, cited *ibid*, p 157.

³⁸ Vertov, 'Articles, journaux, projets', *op cit*, p 156.

³⁹ Ivor Montagu, *With Eisenstein in Hollywood*, Seven Seas Books, East Berlin, 1968, pp 27-8.

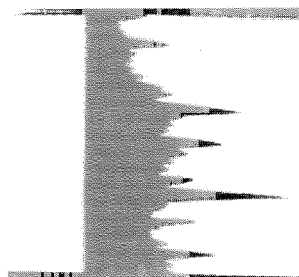
⁴⁰ To be developed in *The Film Factory* (forthcoming), *op cit*.

⁴¹ Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR*, Penguin 1969/76, stresses the massive and unprecedented task of preparing the Five Year Plan, with minimal planning techniques or statistics; hence the Plan was only submitted for approval in April 1929, over six months after it was supposed to have begun.

⁴² Taylor, *op cit*, Ch 6.

⁴³ From the Resolutions of the 1928 Conference, quoted in Taylor, *op cit*, p 152.

⁴⁴ Montagu, *op cit*, p 27.



Above, from the sound recording sequence in *K Sh E*.

ogy and the new themes of the 'cultural revolution'. The first sound films all dealt with aspects of construction: whether industrialisation in *Plan for Great Works* (Room, 1930) and *Enthusiasm* (Vertov, 1931); regional development in *The Earth Thirsts* (Raizman, 1930) and *Alone* (Kozintsev, Trauberg, 1931); or social problems in *Road to Life* (Ekk, 1931). Special emphases of the Plan strategy were also reflected in films with a precision unparalleled in the '20s: the training of peasants as construction workers in *Ivan* (Dovzhenko, 1932); the goal of 'catching up with and surpassing America' in *Men and Jobs* (Macheret, 1932). And in a little known film by Esfir Shub, *K Sh E* (*Komsomol – Patron of Electrification*), the technology of sound recording is actually shown as a prelude to the study of an electrification project.

The fervent debates on the political and artistic role of the cinema which had been a feature of the '20s were subordinated to the new demand that films should be 'comprehensible to the masses'.⁴⁵ Thus the actual structure of early sound films becomes more schematic, while the strong vein of social criticism – of bureaucratic inefficiency, managerial privilege, youthful immorality – so marked in late '20s films, disappears. Under Shumyatsky's regime, many of these tendencies which were already evident, were encouraged and welded into a distinctive new policy of developing exemplary and reproducible *models* for Shumyatsky's 'cinema of the millions'.⁴⁶ Shumyatsky did not discount the importance of international prestige, but it was not to be won at the expense of the growing domestic market by making avant-garde films for the international intelligentsia. Instead *Road to Life* was successfully shown at the Venice Festival and *Chapayev* proudly inaugurated the Fifteenth Anniversary Year which included the first Moscow Film Festival in 1935. As an indication of the complicated linkage between the investment demands of sound as a new technology, the new direction in film policy and the increasing involvement of the state, Shumyatsky claimed that the three sound features completed in 1931 – *The Road to Life*, *Alone* and *The Golden Mountains* (Yutkevich, 1931) – were seen by Stalin, who decided as a result to devote additional resources to the development of sound.⁴⁷ Up to this point, the Plan imperative to end dependence on imported film stock and equipment had taken precedence over conversion to sound. But Shumyatsky's evident success in curbing 'formalist excesses' and bringing forth exemplary works such as *Road to Life* and *Ivan* was to gain new political prestige for the cinema.

Burch has suggested that the introduction of sound may itself have precipitated a new level of political interference in films:

*political cadres suddenly found themselves confronted with a medium which involved spoken discourse, ie the very substance of their political practice. Their competence to intervene far more directly than before was suddenly legitimised.*⁴⁸

⁴⁵ The phrase was used by Petrov-Bytov in 1928 in relation to cinema and taken up by Shumyatsky.

Given that closer political attention was already being paid to cinema (and to all the arts) by 1930, it may have been a foregone conclusion that

the substance of the 'talkies' would attract close scrutiny. But it may be significant that local State censorship also made its first appearance in the United States shortly after the arrival of the talkies. The immediacy of spoken discourse clearly invited a detailed 'textual' censorship which was unknown in the American silent period. Sound cinema also clearly invited closer scrutiny at the script stage, since the finished film was considerably less easy to alter 'invisibly' than the flexible silent film with intertitles. In the USSR, this relative 'rigidity' of the sound film appears to have reacted back on the planning stage, lengthening and bureaucratizing the production process. This tendency, together with the concern for 'exemplary' works, led to a drastic slowing down of production in the '30s, to the point where only 29 films were finished in 1933 (compared with the high point of 112 in 1928).⁴⁹

These are the essential features of the transitional period which need to be set alongside the conventional emphasis on Socialist Realism as the new guiding doctrine for all Soviet art in the '30s. Undoubtedly the assimilation of sound played an important part in the construction of Socialist Realist cinema, (which will form the subject of a later study), but a more immediate priority is to pursue the legacy of the silent period into the early years of sound.

First Steps in Sound

The long period of anticipation was followed by an equally long and gradual transition to 'full sound'. The first public cinema to be re-equipped for sound, The Artistic in Moscow, opened in March 1930 and the rate of conversion continued to be slow, especially in the countryside. While the need for silent production remained, sound production was correspondingly limited. Three more or less distinct, though overlapping, phases can be distinguished within the first period, 1930-32:

(a) **Demonstration pieces** – in addition to the earliest short items which were grouped into three *Collected Sound Programmes*, demonstration films included a direct-sound report on a political trial, *Thirteen Days*, and a documentary on a collective farm, *One of Many*, complete with animal sounds!

(b) **Post-synchronization** – the practice of dubbing already-completed silent films with 'artificial' soundtracks began early with *The Earth Thirsts* (Raizman, 1930) and *Alone*, and continued with the refurbishment of primitive soundtracks.

(c) **Full sound production** – *Plan of Great Works*, Room's compilation on aspects of the Five Year Plan, and *Road to Life* are generally regarded as the first 'full sound' features intended for general release, closely followed by *Enthusiasm*, *The Golden Mountains* and *Ivan*.

Alongside these phases there are traces of 'sound' thinking and construction in a number of silent productions dating from 1928/9 to their final disappearance in 1935/6.

⁴⁶ The title of Shumyatsky's 1935 book.

⁴⁷ Shumyatsky, op cit, p 117.

⁴⁸ Burch, *To the Distant Observer*, op cit, p 147.

⁴⁹ These figures are taken from Steven P Hill's valuable analysis of Soviet pre-war production, 'A Quantitative View of Soviet Cinema', *Cinema Journal* vol 11 no 2 (Spring 1972), p 21.

⁵⁰ Undertaken, like Kristin Thompson's, at the Cinematheque Royale de Belgique, with the kind assistance of Jacques Ledoux and his staff, as preparation for a National Film Theatre programme jointly organised with John Gillett. Many of the films in this season are being shown for the first time since the '30s.

⁵¹ Willemen, 'Cinematic Discourse', op cit.

⁵² Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Penguin, 1975.

From a preliminary survey of some of the 'unknown' (at least in Britain)⁵⁰ films of this transitional period, what is striking is not the sporadic evidence of sound-image counterpoint, but of a deeper 'structuring impact of the verbal'⁵¹ and of a wide range of responses to the challenge of 'outer speech'. These are manifested in a number of thematic devices and rhetorical strategies which focus attention on the *novelty* of sound and specifically on the new dimension of audible speech. Below are four examples: two of the thematic device of 'parapraxis', in Freud's sense of a symptomatic error or bungled action⁵²; and two of the rhetorical strategy of translation between languages.

PARAPRAXES

1. *Men and Jobs* (Macheret, 1932) deals with the Five Year Plan policy of bringing in foreign 'experts' to supervise major technological projects and train Soviet technologists. In this film, the American construction expert, Mr Klin, is first seen arriving by train with his portable gramophone and jazz records. His relationship—at first antagonistic, eventually friendly—with an archetypal Soviet shock-worker (played by Nikolai Okhlopkov, the famous stage actor and director) forms the central body of the film. The theme is the need to learn from foreign experts and the potential for converting them. What is remarkable, however, is the device on which the final sequence turns: Klin is writing home to his wife, explaining his change of heart on the Bolsheviks and that he intends to stay longer, when a record playing on his gramophone suddenly sticks in a groove and the word 'Darling' begins to repeat. This is gradually transformed on the soundtrack into the Russian word 'Udarnik' ('shock-worker'), as Klin goes to the window and looks out proudly over the construction site. His moment of commitment is signalled by a 'symptomatic' interruption in routine and 'slippage' between languages.

2. *Lieutenant Kizhe* (Feinzimmer, 1934) is an unexpectedly stylised comedy, with Prokofiev's independently famous music closely integrated into its structure. The story and script were by the Formalist critic, Yuri Tynyanov and, apart from its many intriguing visual 'devices'—such as the use of obvious model soldiers and optically duplicated images—the mainspring of the plot is a slip between the written and the spoken word. Disturbed sound-image relations are present from the beginning as two furtive lovers make contact by exchanging cat and dog sounds, until the silence of the Tsar's sleep is shattered by an alarm call shouted from guard to guard in a rising crescendo. The central slip is of course the invention of Kizhe, who owes his birth to a clerk's error in drawing up an army promotion list. An ink blot is inadvertently converted into the name Kizhe—which imaginary officer is promptly blamed for the original disturbance and starts his career by being sent into exile in Siberia. Later, as he rises through the ranks and is married, his bride punningly explains to the wedding guests that Kizhe has no 'presence', to account for his invisibility during the ceremony. *Lieutenant Kizhe* is



Lieutenant Kizhe, 1934.

in fact a remarkable working model of Formalist literary theory, couched in the form of a fable on the generative power of language.

These and, doubtless, other examples point to an awareness of the potential for renewing perception, as Formalist theory would have it, and exploring the new terrain of *talking* cinema by introducing speech-specific devices. It would be interesting in this respect to see the early sound film that featured a gramophone as its central 'character', *The Mechanical Traitor*; and also to consider the use of 'miscueing' in Barnet's *Outskirts*.

TRANSLATION

Translation between languages is, on one level, an inevitable realistic consequence of sound films involving speakers of different nationalities. But this new problem of communication can also serve as a means of 'defamiliarising' by delaying what would otherwise be naturalistic dialogue. Again, two instances:

3. *Deserter* (Pudovkin, 1933) is the story of how a German workers' leader, Renn, is selected to go on an exchange visit to the USSR after his comrades have experienced a severe political defeat. Renn seizes the opportunity to escape from a difficult situation and stays on after the others return, becoming a valuable member of a factory shock brigade. At a mass meeting to celebrate the brigade's achievements, his conscience forces him to decline the invitation to join the factory committee and instead he declares publicly—and haltingly through a translator, since he has learned little Russian—that he must return to take his place 'at this decisive moment of class struggle'. Pudovkin has described his approach to the sequence in psychological terms:

*At the beginning of this scene we see and hear shots longish in duration, first of the speaking hero, then of the translator. In the process of development of the episode, the image of the translator becomes shorter and the majority of his words accompany the images of the hero, according as the interest of the audience automatically fixes on the latter's psychological position.*⁵³

Here the 'delay' of translation, coming after the linguistic isolation of Renn's stay in the USSR, produces a graphic representation of his alienation, which is ended by a 'correct' decision that restores to him the effective power of speech. (A similar sequence involving translation and the symbolic exchange of halting words in the other language occurs in *Men and Jobs*.)

4. *Tommy* (Protazanov, 1931) In Protazanov's first sound film, based on Ivanov's celebrated '20s play, *Armoured Train 14-29*, an English soldier serving with the intervention forces is captured by Red partisans. (In a brilliant 'subjective' trope, the lone soldier on sentry duty day-dreams of the foundry where he works at home and imagines that a crane knocks him over—just as the partisans surprise him!) The partisan leader,



Deserter, 1933.

⁵³ V I Pudovkin, *Pudovkin on Film Technique*, trans Ivor Montagu, Memorial Edition, Vision Press, London, 1958, p 189.

unable to speak English, desperately tries to explain to the soldier what they stand for: he shouts 'Lenin' and gets a glimmer of response; then he seizes an icon of Abraham and Isaac and with vigorous gestures 'interprets' it as an allegory of the bourgeoisie attacking the proletariat, with the Angel standing for Imperialist intervention by Britain and the USA. Tommy finally 'gets the picture' and joins forces with the partisans, while elsewhere his captain chats with White Russian officers and explains that he learnt his fluent Russian looking after British industrial interests before the Revolution. Here the triumph of non-verbal communication between 'natural' class allies is set against the easy but empty exchanges of the officer classes and, as so often in Protazanov's unjustly neglected work, schematic confrontation is fleshed out in dialectical and satirical detail.

From 'Inner Speech' to 'Outer Speech'

Instead of looking for evidence of the survival of montage procedures, such as counterpoint or 'asynchronism', in the early sound period, it may be more productive to see this long transition as one of negotiation between two distinct regimes of discourse. The montage regime, with its origins in the early post-revolutionary *agitki* and in the analytic experiments of Kuleshov, Vertov and Shub, had become increasingly formalized and intellectualized as an artistic system. By contrast, the emergent Soviet 'popular' cinema remained highly eclectic and pragmatic, drawing from a wide range of foreign examples and shamelessly imitating them. 'Inner speech' was proposed first as the theoretical 'guarantee' of montage's coherence and was later taken up, notably by Eisenstein, as a model for the further elaboration of the montage system.

The threat of the new sound regime lay in its apparent alliance with a series of established 'public discourses' – theoretical, literary, political – and the danger of the cinema losing its hard-won specificity, identified with montage, by collapsing into one or other of these. Outer speech appeared to threaten the sophisticated inner speech model with banalization and, indeed, with forms of censorship and repression unknown in the silent period. But this is not to suggest that 'inner speech' no longer played a part in the construction of sound cinema: on the contrary, its role was to be re-defined as spectators adjusted to the new address of the talkies. The new situation can be characterized by reference to another strand in Formalist theory, Voloshinov's paper on 'Reported Speech', in which he defines the problem posed by dialogue:

*How, in fact, is another speaker's speech received? What is the mode of existence of another's utterance in the actual, inner speech-consciousness of the recipient? How is it manipulated there, and what process of orientation will the subsequent speech of the recipient have undergone in regard to it?*⁵⁴

⁵⁴ V N Voloshinov, 'Reported Speech' (1930) in *Readings in Russian Poetics* (ed) Ladislav Matejka, Krystyna Pomorska, Michigan Slavic Contributions 8, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1978, p 158.

• Soviet film-makers of the early sound period were faced with a bewildering range of problems in the technical, political and aesthetic spheres.

With sound as, in Jakobson's term, the new 'dominant'⁵⁵ or 'focusing component' of the transitional period, they tackled the problem with an originality that has remained unacknowledged and unexamined. Not until the interpretative myths of the later '30s and the Cold War have been peeled back and the texts and films made available, will any full assessment of the achievements of this crucial period be possible.

⁵⁵ Roman Jakobson, 'The Dominant' (1935) in *Readings in Russian Poetics*, op cit, p 82.

The film season 'Into the Thirties: Soviet Cinema in Transition' runs during July at the National Film Theatre, London.

- July 6 *Boule de Suif* (1934) Dir: Mikhail Romm/*The Forty-First* (1927) Dir: Yakov Protazanov
- July 6 *Deserter* (1933) Dir: V I Pudovkin
- July 8 *Penal Servitude* (1928) Dir: Yuli Raizman
- July 8/11 *Chapayev* (1934) Dir: S & G Vassiliev
- July 9/11 *Spring* (1930) Dir: M Kaufman/*Moscow in October* (1927) Dir: Boris Barnet
- July 10 *Road to Life* (1931) Dir: Nikolai Ekk
- July 10 *The Doll with Millions* (1928) Dir: Sergei Komarov
- July 13 *Lieutenant Kizhe* (1934) Dir: Alexander Feinzimmer
- July 13 *Yellow Passport* (1927) Dir: Fedor Otsep/*Blue Express* (1930) Dir: Ilya Trauberg
- July 15 *The Last Night* (1937) Dir: I Peltser
- July 17 *A Simple Case* (1932) Dir: V I Pudovkin
- July 17 *Men and Jobs* (1932) Dir: Alexander Macheret
- July 19 *Fragment of an Empire* (1929) Dir: F Ermler
- July 21 *Lone Without Sail* (1937) Dir: Vladimir Legoshin
- July 21 *The Ghost That Never Returns* (1930) Dir: Abram Room
- July 24/27 *Tractor Drivers* (1939) Dir: Ivan Pyriev
- July 24/27 *Shchors* (1939) Dir: Alexander Dovzhenko

ADVERTISING HETEROSEXUALITY

MARY BETH HARALOVICH EXAMINES CHANGING COURTSHIPS IN FILM POSTERS OF THE THIRTIES AND FORTIES

¹ Julia Lesage raised the issue of the impact of the myth of romantic love in 'Feminist Film Criticism: Theory and Practice', *Women and Film* 3/4, pp 14-15. Raymond Bellour addresses the centrality of the problematic of the formation of the couple in narrative film in Janet Bergstrom, 'Alternation, Segmentation, Hypnosis: Interview with Raymond Bellour', *Camera Obscura* 3/4 Summer 1979, pp 87-93.

² Steve Neale, *Genre, British Film* Institute, 1980, p 19.

A MAN AND woman meet; their courtship begins. The path of true love never runs smoothly and the progress of their relationship is retarded. Yet their troubles are resolved in an embrace. The heterosexual couple is united to live an implied happily-ever-after. Almost every Hollywood film incorporates a similar courtship formula into its narrative structure. Courtship has many names: the love story, romantic love, the problematic of couple formation.¹

The pervasiveness of courtship in narrative film gives heterosexual bonding an exalted position in culture. As Steve Neale has noted:

*the practices that constitute mainstream commercial cinema are massively dominant and therefore have a social presence and a social impact far in excess of any others.*²

The culture in which we live is dominated by representations of heterosexual courtship and both women and men are implicated in its terms. To begin to uncoil the Hollywood notion of courtship and to suggest its role in culture, it is necessary to proceed along two avenues of analysis.

Textual analysis of the Hollywood product during the years of the studio system can reveal the breadth and scope of heterosexuality in the Hollywood film. Attention to the conditions of production of the Hollywood product can provide some sense of the historical conditions which affected the representation of heterosexuality.

Rather than films, I looked at film posters. Posters were, and are today, a primary means of advertising the Hollywood product. They contain similar narrative devices but focus on the relationship of characters to narrative. The Warner Brothers film posters from the 1930s and 1940s firmly establish audience expectations for the centrality of heterosexual courtship in the films.³



**MEN WHO DARE—and
WOMEN WHO WAIT!**



WARNER BROS.
present

JOHN

BARRYMORE

in **"MOBY DICK"**

with JOAN BENNETT

How much hardship can a man's bravery withstand? How much waiting can a woman's love endure? You'll learn from this great adventure epic and this beautiful romance.



³ The Warner Brothers posters from the 1930-1948 period were randomly sampled in order to generate a representative sample of the Warner Brothers product during the studio period. The period was divided into three-year intervals in order to provide a manageable timeline for diachronic analysis of the posters. The sample includes 10 posters from each of the following years: 1930, 1933, 1936, 1939, 1942, 1945 and 1948.

⁴ Michèle Barrett, Philip Corrigan, Annette Kuhn and Janet Wolff, 'Representation and Cultural Production' in Barrett, et. al, eds, *Ideology and Cultural Production*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1979, p 24.

⁵ Roland Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', in *Image, Music, Text*, trans Stephen Heath, New York, Hill and Wang, 1977, p 33.

⁶ The four posters which contained no reference to heterosexual relationships are: *Nancy Drew, Reporter* (1939) which presents only Nancy Drew engaged in solving a mystery; *The Adventures of Jane*

Yet the terms of the courtship change over the 20-year period. In the early 1930s, romantic relationships are sensationalized through codes of sexual passion. In the middle and late 1930s, there is a marked shift to unsexualized romantic love. In the 1940s, there is a return to an emphasis on sexual passion and the objectified display of women's bodies. Each of these three periods contains elements of both types of heterosexual bonding, yet in each period one type is clearly dominant.

To begin to account for these diachronic shifts, analysis must go beyond the textual analysis of codes of heterosexual bonding in posters to what Michèle Barrett, Philip Corrigan, Annette Kuhn and Janet Wolff refer to as the 'historically specific conditions of existence' of the cultural product.⁴ In the case of representation of heterosexual bonding in film posters, the changes were brought about, in part, by a conjunction of historically specific conditions both within the film industry and external to it.

Posters and Films: Shared Attributes

In his analysis of advertising in 'Rhetoric of the Image', Roland Barthes writes:

*Because in advertising the signification of the image is undoubtedly intentional, the signifieds of the advertising message are formed a priori by certain attributes of the product and those signifieds have to be transmitted as clearly as possible.*⁵

The attributes of the Hollywood film which are clearly transmitted in posters are: the title of the film, its stars, character traits and the narrative enigmas in which the characters function. These are most important to the marketing of films; production personnel are secondary. Character traits and motivation depicted in the posters clearly designate the importance of heterosexual relationships in the Hollywood film. A courtship relationship between male and female characters is present in the overwhelming majority of the posters (96% or 66 of 70).⁶

For example, *Moby Dick* (1930) is commonly acknowledged to be the story of Captain Ahab and the whale. But the poster indicates that the film is about 'men at sea' and 'women who wait' for the men. This delay in the resolution of the courtship is as important to the film as the sailing story. The man is a sailor whose goal to be at sea necessitates his separation from the woman. Thus, the sailing story is intertwined with the love story.

Posters place the characters *within* the narrative of the film, at a point of narrative enigma. Rather than representing the beginning or ending of the narrative, posters concentrate attention on moments of narrative rupture, thus foregrounding the enigmas which the film will resolve. Heterosexual relationships are represented as *in process*, i.e. the process of courtship.

Fragments of key narrative elements are transposed in posters into fragmented images and text. On the poster for *In This Our Life* (1942), over the face of Bette Davis are printed the words: 'She didn't give...' Directly below it is the phrase: 'She only took...'. The Davis character is established as protagonist by her position in the poster and by the way the fragments of text and her image are graphically juxtaposed. The words explicitly define her character traits; her face looms over the faces of the other actors in a position of graphic dominance.

Her traits are firmly placed in a causal relationship with the other characters. Fragmented sentence combines with fragments of bodies: 'She only took... her (Olivia de Havilland's) husband... his (George Brent's) career... his (Dennis Morgan's) life!' An initial state of narrative stasis is assumed prior to the defiant actions of the Davis character. The rupture of that stasis is focused upon her character as the determining agent of the rupture. The enigma presented by the rupture is the process of heterosexual bonding. 'See Bette Davis and Olivia de Havilland battle for George Brent (and) Dennis Morgan!'

All but four of the Warner Brothers posters in the sample foreground male and female characters in the process of courtship. This insistence on the unresolved relationship has important implications for film as a cultural product. Films are often marketed by representations of heterosexual bonding in process, and heterosexuality functions as one guarantee of the Hollywood cinematic institution. Heterosexual bonding is a necessity of the film industry requiring the containment of creative work within established frameworks of notions of female/male relationships in process, or courtship. Posters engage the desire of the spectator for a particular kind of closure, hence the ideological project of the Hollywood film includes the closure of the courtship—monogamy, marriage—as one of the terms of the closure of the narrative.

In 40% of the sample posters (28 of 70), courtship is the only enigma presented. *June Bride* (1948) is obviously a love story. The poster consists of a man and a woman sitting on a wedding cake, looking at each other. Her desire to bond is reinforced by the gleam in her eyes: 'She wanted the wedding to be right. She almost got left!' His character provides the motivation for retarding the central enigma of their union: 'He's the schmo of the week—52 weeks a year!'

54% of the posters (38 of 70) contain multiple enigmas presenting two narrative lines. In these, a causal relationship is established between heterosexual bonding and the other enigma. In *Numbered Men* (1930), the figure of a woman looks on in horror as male prisoners riot. The text explicitly states the causal relationship between heterosexual desires and jail riots: 'What Causes Jail Riots?' (Capital letters suggest a newspaper expose.) 'How much of a part does love play? What gives these numbered men the crazy courage that sends them rushing in a wicked frenzy to freedom or ruin?' The two narrative enigmas are dependent on each other: male desire for the absent woman erupted in a prison revolt.

Some posters do not posit this causality explicitly, but suggest the integration of the couple with another narrative line. The poster for

Arden (1939) which focuses on Jane Arden behind the scenes of a film studio; *Everybody's Hobby* (1939) which is the only poster in the sample about an unthreatened nuclear family; and *Rope* (1948) which concentrates on codes of mystery and the authorship of Alfred Hitchcock.



Telegraph Trail (1933) is dominated by a large picture of a man protecting a woman against a common danger. The poster is heavily coded with Western iconography. The title indicates that the central enigma is about building telegraph lines in the old west. Despite the fact that the Western is the central enigma, the heterosexual relationship is the central focus of the poster. The couple is graphically surrounded by relatively small images of John Wayne atop a telegraph pole and fighting with another man. The Western conventions integrate the couple into a Western story. The existence of the couple is threatened by the dangers of the old west.

Idealized Love/Sensational Love

Heterosexual bonding in Hollywood films is pervasive and integrated causally into other narrative lines, but it is not a monolithic notion. This analysis generated three distinct historical periods characterized by the type of love interest manifested in the posters. In the early 1930s and the 1940s, the romantic interest centered on women as objects of sexual passion, willingly provocative or passive cheesecake. In the middle and late 1930s, however, the heterosexual relationships were not sexualized but innocuous and idealized.

In the 1930-1933 period, relationships between men and women were sensationalized. In *Numbered Men* (1930), sexual passion caused jail riots. *Divorce Among Friends* (1930) is a boudoir comedy about wives exchanging husbands. In *Picture Snatcher* (1933) a voyeuristic photographer looks up a woman's skirt. *Ladies They Talk About* (1933) is advertised with a provocatively posed woman reclining on a chaise longue. *Wild Boys of the Road* (1933) titillates with an attack on a young woman by an older man.

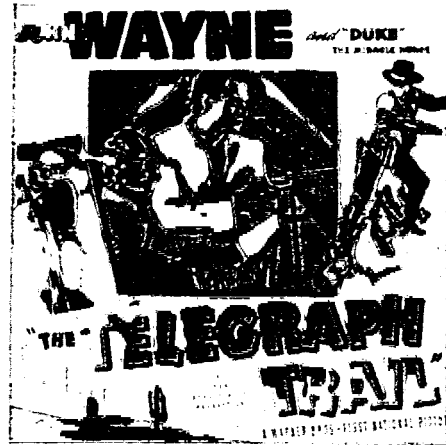
Six of the 20 posters in this period represent a male/female relationship in innocuous terms such as that of *Telegraph Trail* (1933) and *The Kennel Murder Case* (1933) in which a couple faces a common danger. But 70% of the posters from this first period define the heterosexual relationship in terms of sexual passion.

The posters from 1936 and 1939 demonstrate a marked shift in the representation of courtship. *Brides Are Like That* (1936), *King of Hockey* (1936) and *Torchy Blane in Chinatown* (1939) are about young, unsexual love: the comic antics of newlyweds, an athlete who is a 'chump in love', a young woman detective who outwits her boyfriend. *China Clipper* (1936) and *Secret Service of the Air* (1939) unite a couple in a common pursuit.

Five of the 20 posters from this middle period sensationalize heterosexual relationships but with much less explicit sexual passion than those of the early 1930s. The picture of the laughing couple in *Times Square Playboy* (1936) is not sexually coded. But the text establishes them in a narrative about an extramarital affair: 'His wife made him yell "Uncle" when a Broadway baby called him "Daddy"!' Compare this triangle with that of the earlier *Central Airport* (1933). Here the charac-



ters are given more explicitly sexual traits: passionate looks of a man and a woman caught by another man. The text also focuses on passion: 'Are girl fliers as careless with their kisses as they are with their lives?' Conversely, women's overt sexuality during the 1936-1939 period is confined to costumes appropriate to dance hall girls in *Dodge City* (1939), cheerleaders in *Freshman Love* (1936) and showgirls in *On Your Toes* (1939).





In the 1940s the Warner posters return to sexual passion and provocative or cheesecake poses from female figures. In *Wings For the Eagle* (1942), *This Was Paris* (1942) and *Hotel Berlin* (1945), sexy women fight World War II at home and overseas. In *Escape From Crime* (1942), *Lady Gangster* (1942) and *Danger Signal* (1945), women with significant cleavage in frontal poses are involved with criminally dangerous men. In *Wallflower* (1948) and *Two Guys From Texas* (1948), women are on display as cheesecake. *The Gay Sisters* (1942), *Mildred Pierce* (1945) and *The Decision of Christopher Blake* (1948) do not use cheesecake but present the women characters in lurid relationships: living 'secret lives', 'the kind of woman most men want but shouldn't have' and 'the kind of woman a man couldn't trust'.

Seven of the 30 posters in this last period focus on 'wholesome' relationships. *Romance on the High Seas* (1948) and *The Pride of the Marines* (1945) appear to be about happy couples in love. But, like the early 1930s, the 1940s are dominated by sensationalized relationships between men and women.

Historical Changes/Historical Conditions

The historical conditions of heterosexual bonding in film posters obviously changed during the Hollywood studio years. Emphasis on the process of courtship remained, but the terms of the male/female relationship underwent radical changes with the representation of women as the site of these changes. The mid-1930s inaugurated a short period of conservatism in which women's bodies were clothed and in which male/female relationships were not especially sexual. The early 1930s and the 1940s were characterized by the representation of women as objects of male sexual desire and by the display of women's bodies as the focus of sensational heterosexuality.

As an initial step in determining the context of these differences in film posters, I looked to the conditions of production of film advertising. This inquiry demonstrated that the film industry responded to cultural influences at two moments during the studio period: the mid-1930s and the late-1930s. The industry's adaptation to cultural demands changed the representation of heterosexual courtship in film posters.

In November 1933, the film industry incorporated an Advertising Advisory Council (AAC) into the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA). The MPPDA was an organization composed of the executives of the major film corporations. Its purpose included the voluntary self-regulation of film industry practices.

The MPPDA was created in response to public outcry against immoral activities in the film industry (i.e. the Fatty Arbuckle case, etc.) in 1922. Under the leadership of Will Hays, the MPPDA continually justified its existence by providing self-censorship and self-control rather than submitting the film industry to the rigours of external censorship. The MPPDA therefore played an important public relations function. Its rules and regulations also brought the film industry under the control of the oligopoly of the major studios.⁷

⁷ For discussion of the activities of the MPPDA, see Howard T Lewis, *The Motion Picture Industry*, New York, D Van Nostrand Company Inc, 1933, and Ruth A Inglis, *Freedom of the Movies: A Report on Self-Regulation from The Commission on Freedom of the Press*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1947.

⁸ For a discussion of the MPPDA's relationship to the NRA, see J Douglas Gomery, 'Hollywood, The National Recovery Administration, and the Question of Monopoly Power', *The Journal of the University Film Association*, vol 31 no 2, Spring 1979, pp 47-52.

The National Recovery Act provided the MPPDA with the opportunity to write a strong Advertising Code. Instituted by Franklin Roosevelt in 1933, the NRA was a federal agency which attempted to regulate wages and prices to combat the effects of the Depression. Each industry wrote its own NRA code which was then approved by Roosevelt.⁸

With the film industry's adoption of the NRA code, the MPPDA's Advertising Code became legally binding for MPPDA members and non-members alike. Article VII, Part 2 of the industry's NRA code stated:

*The industry pledges its combined strength to maintain the best standards of advertising and publicity procedure. To that end the industry pledges itself and shall adhere to the regulations promulgated by and within the industry to assure the attainment of such purpose.*⁹

The MPPDA's regulatory agency for ensuring cooperation with the NRA was the Advertising Advisory Council. According to Will Hays, the purpose of the AAC was to

*render service and advice in connection with motion picture advertising and exploitation to the point of eliminating the objectionable features in all types of motion picture advertising.*¹⁰

In practical terms, this means that the AAC passed or rejected every piece of advertising prior to its distribution, including posters, sketches, publicity stories, accessories, press books and exploitation ideas.¹¹ Prior to the AAC, film advertising was loosely organized. The producing companies made up advertising for distribution but theatre owners were also free to construct their own ads for the films. After the AAC, the MPPDA absorbed the process of advertising, passing or rejecting each piece before its distribution and exhibition.

J J McCarthy, head of the AAC, stated the principles by which the AAC reviewed advertising:

*We do not have any elaborate set of rules and regulations in passing upon copy and illustrations. We simply require that material submitted be in good taste. If it is, we approve it. If it is not, we reject it.*¹²

While McCarthy is vague, the provisions of the Advertising Code provide some sense of how the AAC changed the representation of heterosexual bonding. Three of the 12 provisions of the Advertising Code apply:

Good taste shall be the guiding rule of motion picture advertising.

Profanity and vulgarity shall be avoided.

*Nudity with meretricious purpose, and salacious postures, shall not be used.*¹³

⁹ For the complete text of the film industry's NRA Code, see *Film Daily Year Book*, New York, The Film Daily, 1934, pp 598-614.

¹⁰ 'Hays Announces New Ad Council Under McCarthy', *Motion Picture Herald*, vol 113 no 11, December 9 1933.

¹¹ John J McCarthy, 'Movie Advertising Is Clean', *Printers' Ink* November 15 1933, pp 31-36. (John J McCarthy is not related to J J McCarthy of the AAC.) James P Cunningham, 'Industry Winning Its Own Fight to Prevent Objectionable Copy', *Motion Picture Herald*, vol 113, no 12 December 16 1933, p 17.

¹² McCarthy, *op cit*, p 32.

¹³ The complete text of the Advertising Code can be found in *The Film Daily Year Book*, New York, The Film Daily, 1932, p 605.

¹⁴ McCarthy, *op cit*, p 32.

¹⁵ *Nineteenth Annual Report on the Motion Picture Industry*, Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association, 1941, p 18.

¹⁶ *Motion Picture Herald*, vol 127 no 4 April 24 1937, p 15.

¹⁷ Theodore Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century* Urbana, The University of Illinois Press, 1956, pp 316-319. James Playsted Wood, *Magazines in the United States* New York, The Ronald Press Company, 1971, p 215.

¹⁸ James LeRoy Johnston, 'Stillmen Mustn't Stand Still', *International Photographer*, vol 11 no 1, February 1939, p 10.

¹⁹ James N Doolittle, 'They Mustn't Stand Still', *International Photographer*, vol 11 no 2 March 1939, p 16.

²⁰ Gib, 'Credit Due Stillman', *International Photographer*, vol 11 no 10, November 1939, p 8.

The success of the AAC was so great that in 1934, when the Legion of Decency began its vociferous campaign against indecency in films, 'there was not a single complaint raised against motion picture advertising'.¹⁴

By 1940, the film industry was challenging the prescriptions of good taste of the AAC. The MPPDA reported that the number of advertisements rejected in 1940 was 'almost double' the percentage for 1939.¹⁵ The cultural climate had changed and the Advertising Code was now a hindrance to motion picture advertising. Beginning with the rise of the mass circulation 'candid-camera' magazines in the late 1930s, film advertising had to meet the demand of newspapers and magazines for 'lessening of conservatism of motion picture photographs of female film players'.¹⁶ This trend was solidified with World War II and the use of the pin-up for boosting GI morale.

In late 1936, Henry Luce's *Life* appeared on news-stands. It was followed in close order by *Look*, *Pic* and *Click*. Four months after *Life* appeared, its circulation was 1,080,000. Ten months after *Look* hit the news-stands, its circulation was 1,700,000. By the late 1930s, *Life* and *Look* were the top two mass circulation magazines in the United States.¹⁷

The significance of these new publications was discussed in 1939 in *International Photographer*, the trade journal of the film industry's still photographers. John LeRoy Johnston, Director of Publicity for Walter Wanger Productions, pointed out that these popular pictorial magazines were catering to the same clientele as the motion picture industry. He exhorted publicity personnel to 'think like editors' so that they might produce photographs with the 'new techniques' and 'new methods of picture presentation' developed by magazine and newspaper editors.¹⁸

James Doolittle, still photographer and founder of IATSE Local 659 of still photographers, disagreed with Johnston. He wrote:

*The editors of Look, Life, Click, Pic - phooey! If they have 'raised their sights' it was only to get them far enough above the mud to keep clear of the law. Magazines and newspapers have no Hays office - yet!*¹⁹

Doolittle was referring to the AAC. While photographers from the magazines, newspapers and syndicates did not have an internal Advertising Code, these photographers did cover the film industry, leading to competition with studio photographers.

The editor of *International Photographer* alluded to the difficulties studio photographers had with the Advertising Code:

*The job of merchandising personalities - and particularly the many facets of feminine allure - has been accomplished under a variety of hindrances, censorship and other limitations never encountered by the widely exploited photographic wizards in other fields.*²⁰

While the MPPDA did not explicitly change its standards of good taste, it is obvious that it silently acquiesced to these cultural demands in order

to protect the best interest of the film industry. By the time of World War II, the pin-up photograph of Hollywood female stars in cheesecake poses was a staple of film advertising.

Arthur Wilde, active in motion picture advertising and publicity since the 1930s, verified the usual causal relationship between the pin-up and World War II:

*In the war we had a big excuse . . . We could go a little bit further because it was for the poor boys fighting overseas. We could put a little bit more sex into it. We were using it to go overseas (but) we were publishing it in papers over here first.*²¹

Pocket-sized editions of fan magazines such as *Modern Screen* and *Screen Romances* were chosen for distribution to soldiers by the Army. The Special Services branch paid for and printed these special editions for the 'khaki-clad film fans in the United States forces overseas'. These government-issue fan magazines were different from the domestic variety. They contained no advertising but the Army asked the publicity departments

*to contribute special copy and pictures. Pin-up girls are in special demand for the military edition.*²²

The shift from sensational heterosexual relationships to unsexualized romance between men and women occurred in the early 1930s in a cultural context which included the development of an Advertising Advisory Council under the monopoly potential of the National Recovery Act. The 1930s were characterized by the successful standardization of the advertising product under the guidelines of the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association.

The renewed emphasis on sensational heterosexual relationships in the 1940s finds its context in challenges to the MPPDA through the medium of film advertising. This centered on the still photograph, which was the basis for different kinds of film advertising. Stills were used for 'poster art' (photographs of a film's stars taken during the last few days of film production which were then transformed into posters) as well as publicity pictures.

Hollywood-produced still photographs appropriate to the editorial policies of mass circulation magazines were not possible under the 1930s AAC. That the AAC silently changed its standards of acceptability was evidenced by the popularity of the pin-up figure of female stars like Betty Grable and Rita Hayworth.

Representations of courtship in the Warner Brothers film posters of the 1930s and 1940s are cultural products which changed as their historical determinations changed. The film industry made internal adjustments to external conditions in order to perpetuate the institution of Hollywood cinema. This brief overview of some of the conditions of existence of Hollywood advertising practices suggests the scope of the

²¹ Interview with Arthur Wilde, Director of Publicity, Twentieth-Century-Fox (June 1981).

²² 'G I Pin-ups', *Motion Picture Herald*, vol 153 no 2, October 1943, p 9.

film industry's cultural context. The kind of representations of heterosexual bonding which the film industry worked to restrain in the 1930s became the dominant currency of the 1940s.

Thanks to Maxine Fleckner of the Film Archive of the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research for permission to use the Archive's poster collection.

SUB SIVANCE

- 30 On: Literature and Psychoanalysis; Paranoia, Pynchon and Preterition; Interview with Philippe Sollers; Cognitive Mapping; Non-Euclidean Rhetoric; Merleau-Ponty. By: Octave Mannoni, Louis Mackey, Shuhsi Kao, Richard Bjornson, John Mowitt, Allen S. Weiss. Reviews.
- 31 **The Thing USA.** Guest Editor: Tom Conley. "Title (to be specified)" by Jacques Derrida; "The Sculptural Opaque" by Yve-Alain Bois; "Painting in Shreds" by Jean Clay; "Photorealism, Kitsch and Venturi" by Jean-Claude Lebensztejn; "Reading Art Through Duchamp's *Glass* and Derrida's *Glas*" by Carol P. James. Illustrations.
- 32 **Versions of Feminism.** On: Myself and M/others; A Reading of *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*; Erotica: The Semey Side of Semiotics; Cixous' Exorbitant Texts; Towards a Theory of Displacement; Secrets and Secrecy in a La Fontaine Fable. By: Mary Lydon, Eleanor Honig Skoller, Cathy Schwichtenberg, Brian Duren, Josette Féral, Ross Chambers.

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HISTORY TO HOLLYWOOD

61

MICK EATON TALKS TO TREVOR GRIFFITHS



Diane 'n' Warren amidst soldiers on the Russian border in *Reds*.

Screen: How and when did you become involved in Reds?

Trevor Griffiths: I visited America for the first time in early 1976. Up to that point I had sought not to go there, principally because of the Vietnam war. When I finally did go it was to put on *Comedians* on Broadway through Mike Nichols, who was going to direct it. I met Warren Beatty and we spent a day together in a lot of other people's company talking about American politics. A couple of weeks later I got a phone call from Warren asking me what I knew about John Reed. I thought this was just a casual request so I said 'I know a bit, what do you want to know?' He said 'I don't want to know anything, I've been researching him for six or seven years. I want to do a movie, are you interested?' That a major Hollywood producer wanted to do a life of John Reed seemed to me fantastically important in terms of content. I took six months trying to decide if there would be any yield for the sort of cultural politics I'm involved in in pursuing this. I thought it was worth going ahead so I asked my agent to send him some of my writing.

Had he seen any before?

No, after we talked he read *Occupations* and *The Party* and saw *Comedians*. Then, in January '77, a contract was drawn up which I didn't sign until May or June '78, because I was still working for conditions—control of the material. It was a forlorn hope to think that one could get better conditions than those that currently apply for screenplay writers, but I was trying to secure things like the right to publish my own text, which I got.

At what stage was the work he'd done on the project when you became involved? Was there already a script?

No. There was a step outline prepared in 1972. What we did discuss from the outset was that it was going to be an epic movie and that we would use what we called 'the old folk'. In the early '70s Warren had gone round the States with a 16mm camera shooting people who knew the Reeds and knew the period. They became 'the witnesses', which is a much more dubious term, only after I'd left the production. As you know many of them were not witnesses to anything in particular.

So why were those particular people chosen?

You're asking the wrong person.

Did he film more people than those who appeared in the final film?

Let me separate out the two things: the witnesses in the film were specially shot by (Vittorio) Storaro, none of the 16mm was used—that was really to get those people on record before they died. It was always Warren's idea to use actual testimony in some way, but it was difficult to write because the work hadn't been done; the director had to write it on film. So when I wrote the first draft screenplay I fictionalised that element—what would I like them to say? I invented characters and conversations of old Wobblies and an old Bolshevik who had taken the Reeds round Moscow in 1917, who represented old Bolshevism, but it was fiction.

I finished the first draft in the spring of '78; Warren liked it and had it read by people he's worked with and respects. He came back to New York in September with a fairly heavy critique of the screenplay. He had the distinct idea that this was a 'religious text'. Put at its most extreme, this view had been presented to him as 'Jesus Christ, you can't make a film about a fucking Communist who's right, who's not criticised.' It was more complex than that, but I understood it as: if the movie is about John Reed, and what he represents is shown to be indisputably right, then it would look like the life of Christ. I don't need to tell you that in my view the first draft was nothing like that. I think we were talking about the distance between what you can say about Communism in

Europe and what you can say about it in 'the freest country in the world', America. What my text failed to take account of was the extraordinary distance which separates Americans, even the most progressive, from any view of socialism.

That presumably is a distance from their own country's past as well.

Absolutely. One of the least realized things about this movie is the second half, where there was an opportunity to present an early twentieth century America which was oppressive, anti-Communist, anti-worker in a very concrete way. It would not have been difficult and it would not have been expensive to have had scenes of Reed covering the Chicago trial of the 101 Wobbly leaders who between them received 10,000 years of jail sentences. A simple scene as I wrote it could have shown some of the social and industrial conditions against which people were mobilising themselves towards a better future. But we didn't see them – the Palmer laws and the Palmer raids were rendered down to one scene, which was effective but very personalized.

When it became clear that a radically revised second draft was on the cards I offered simply to expedite it. It seemed to me that we ought to take a great leap forward on the text and I suggested that we work together eyeball to eyeball across a table. But when you're working on a realistic text you get into all sorts of endless discussions about 'would they really have done it like this?'. It's just sharing clichés about 'the way the world really is'.

v

Was that mitigated by the fact that you were dealing with historical characters and the constraints of historical events?

Only if you believe that there is such a thing as history. But the great value of history for Hollywood is that it doesn't have fixed co-ordinates. It doesn't have meanings very often. Part of the film's use of the witnesses device is to deny the objective validity of history – that it cannot be re-summoned or re-traced. A most ludicrous proposition seems to be hinted at there, which is that all history is oral history. As you can see by looking at these tired people, they often don't remember a thing. I don't suffer from that American view of history and historiography. History to Hollywood is a blank cheque – it offers an infinity of opportunities, you can invent it where it won't fit. And when you're talking about a buried history that so little has been written about, it's very simple to reconstruct it without ever asserting that it's been constructed in the first place.

We wrote the second draft in about ten to twelve weeks working together all the time; then I had to come home. I was pretty unhappy. I really disliked what we had written a lot by that stage, but was able to see that what we had written was certainly more capitalizable than what I had written initially. The effect of the second draft was to centre the Reed-Bryant relationship much more heavily and to push the political life of

the characters into the middle distance from the actions, which were human love and need as conventionalised romantically.

When we finished that, Warren went back to Hollywood and I went back to England. Later he was in England for about a week and we worked for two or three days on the text stage three. I was oddly conflicted in this. I had now spent two years on the project and was beginning to go crazy about the lack of power one had over one's work but at the same time I really didn't want the text to stay in that second draft form. Those two or three days were among the most dispiriting that I had spent on the project, because I think Warren knew that this draft wouldn't do—but knew that he would disagree with me on what would have to go. It was more like a marketing ideas session in advertising: ideas were not rooted in moral value or a sense of history or character any longer. I remember that late in the afternoon that I split from the project, he got very excited that the key to John Reed was not that he was a Communist, which would stick in the craw of twenty million Americans, but that he was a pacifist who praised the Bolsheviks because they took Russia out of the war. Well that was bullshit—the ultimate cop-out; but I also knew that pacifism doesn't sell—it even stank commercially. (I hope that if you print this you'll find some way of indicating that I find all this ironic and amusing—I don't want it to sound like some great bitter diatribe.)

Does that mean that Beatty's initial ideological commitment to the project changed dramatically to arrive at that position?

I don't know. There's no doubt about his obsession to make the film. He never seemed to me to be interested in them as historical facts, much more as shapes with which to infuse elements of his own life and his own time. I find the film baffling in that it looks like the period and sounds like now, and I feel manipulated by that. Perhaps it was just as corny as: Reed had a dream, an ideal, a vision of the future.

So the specificities of that dream become less important than its existence?

They become positively embarrassing: Reed becomes a personal friend of Lenin, he becomes a member of the propaganda bureau of Komin-tern, a really dirty little outfit that was. So that's unheroic behaviour—that's machine politics. The second half of the film, which in my original text was devoted to party organisation, was psychologized into something else: 'these are the dangers of ideals and obsessions, here is a monomaniac going crazy, here is a man driven to a point where he cannot observe how badly he is behaving in his primary relationships.'

These sorts of questions, about organisation and argument, are not considered interesting in comparison with questions of a psychological order?

Yes, it's a different order. It's always argued that a popular audience will have no idea of what's going on and no interest and they'll just walk out, but that usually hides a distaste and disdain for politics from the people offering that as a reason. They themselves have never been enthusiastic about politics. But I also had a twenty minute section on the Russian Revolution with the Reeds as inspired sightseers, because I said that unless there was a massive filmic event at the heart of the piece you would get no sense of its power and resonance in our lives. I remember a rather obtuse exchange where I was reprovved because I couldn't understand that a bullet was always more dramatic than a speech. What I've spent a lot of my working life trying to show is that argument is often more dramatic than gunfire. So I pulled out in December '78 with the question of my relationship to the finished film text problematic. I took with me a strong sense that it was a movie that I didn't want to be associated with.

Later I met Warren in London and I asked him about the film and it was clear that he felt he'd made something major. It was late in editing at that stage. Then about five weeks later I saw a reasonably fine edit, about 22 reels, mostly in black and white. I saw it on my own and then talked to him about it and it was a very emotional experience. I imagined that I was going to see something which whilst I might admire it technically I would find repugnant politically, but it was much more difficult to weigh its positive and negative yields. There was much that I did admire – a good attempt had been made to recover particular elements of a historical period that had been deliberately covered over, so that they had not fed subsequent generations as to what had been politically achieved. That's a big thing for a Hollywood movie to do, and any movie that succeeds in doing that, even partially, has to be appreciated and supported.

Beatty's Reed was better than I'd ever expected. It was perhaps too self-regarding, but that was always an element in Reed anyway – he was always doing crazy all-American things. I have to be quite scrupulous about the Louise Bryant character. I happen to think that it's Diane Keaton's best performance to date. But I don't like the character – I think it's the worst part in the film. She does achieve a spare, tragic quality by the end of the film; but I find the most hateful thing about the character is that having had that intense experience of revolutionary liberation and release she then becomes a kind of colonized recidivist – she goes back into whining, dependence and domesticity which is inexplicable except in terms of the popular consciousness of what women do. It's a silence in the movie which is filled up by prejudicial expectations. She becomes a kind of critical chorus whose bottom line is always 'What about me?'

It was finally agreed after a lot of discussion that we would share a screenplay credit. My express desire was that everybody who had written *anything* should receive a credit. I thought it would be very bold and innovative to demystify something of text creation, to recognise what is the case in every Hollywood movie. Well that was elbowed out,

presumably because it would have made it look like the film had been created by a committee, but all film scripts are produced by committee.

Was there a lot of writing that was cut or substantially changed?

The problem is that the idiom had been completely transformed. The structure, the character development, the order of scenes remained, broadly speaking, the same, but at the level of dialogue it was late '70s early '80s. I'd made a genuine attempt to create a recovered language of liberal and left intellectuals in Greenwich Village in 1916, which was certainly much more formal than 1979 New York and to that extent less 'American' in Hollywood terms.

Things like that are very important, because they bridge the gap between the past and the present so you never get a sense of the past as something different. Most of the conventions of presenting history in film and TV are very much 'the present in fancy dress'.

The problem is that everyday language embodies the range of possibilities for people at any given time historically. If you think of language as an unending flow handed on from generation to generation, never materially different, then you're stuck within those genre conventions. Just take what's happened to America in terms of the impact of psychoanalysis and how that's affected the language in which people express their possibilities.

Psychoanalysis probably made its impact more acutely on Hollywood script-writers than anywhere else in the world. It's become part of the convention of film characterization. It's usually on the level of costumes, props and locations that people are most nit-picking about authentic period detail, very rarely on the level of the relationship of language to a character's view of what the world could possibly be.

The other thing is that during the production of a film the text is always being changed so the actors' familiarity with the text is not great. He or she will be always drawing on their own language to an extraordinary degree. They will not have learned the text formally in the way that stage actors do. They have to stay flexible so that they are not locked into a performance. So there's something in the way that film is made which makes it very hard to achieve a historically specific language.

Is that the same in television, or is that closer to the theatre?

Television is closer to the theatre in its relation to the text, for many reasons which don't always reflect well on the way of working in television. Like they haven't got the time that film has, so the text of necessity tends to become the blue-print: if you have a text you can budget.

One of the things that is materially different about the conditions of reception between TV and the cinema is that the audience is obviously constructed differently. It's very different seeing something in a big auditorium surrounded by lots of other people, but in the dark on your own, than it is in your home with commercial breaks and your life going on around you. Did that determine a different approach towards your text?

I think it did. It's complicated, but when I work in television here I'm working against television. I had to find out how to work against Hollywood in terms of the generation of a text. I had a preconception of Hollywood which sometimes matched up and sometimes didn't. I was interested in answering one question: How far can one go to say what one considers to be important in the context of a Hollywood entertainment film? I've been surprised by the answer, because I think that much of this movie is deeply impressive. It's a genuine first and I'm very proud of that in so far as I had anything to do with it, and the rest is by no means bad. I don't think that the love relationship is basically uninteresting, it's just that in my view it's wrongly perceived. There are some scenes that are amazingly effective, probably more effective than is imagined by the people who made them. For example, the scene between Reed and Zinoviev on the train where Reed is arguing with passion for dissent and in the middle of this argument about oppositional dissent a shell hits the carriage and explodes behind his head at an extraordinarily complex moment in the argument.



The bullet and the speech: the train scene in *Reds*.

So there you have your bullet and your speech.

Yes, and they're both important. But it's the timing that's interesting as it carries the dialectic of the argument on in a very powerful way.

It also means that for us here, in a place where there aren't any shells exploding outside, we can afford to approach that dialectic differently.

But we can't deny the historicity of that shell and its effect on that argument at a time of civil war.

But neither can we use the historical example of that shell to stop the continuation of that argument about party organization and individual dissent.

So that's an interesting way of relating ourselves to the past and the past to ourselves.

Once I saw you talk at the NFT and you were saying that you were more interested in taking a Lukacsian approach to historical drama, dealing with characters whose class positions are crucial in a particular historical epoch, rather than more formally innovative plays. Can you talk about that?

I'm very opportunistic about theorizing. I'm a fairweather Lukacsian, but it's under a lot of stress at the moment in my current practice. I do seem to have moved into the creation of more self-knowing texts than previously, where I embraced the conventions of realism or naturalism pretty well totally: with interruptions but with no serious challenges, where it's part of the device of production that the text does not know itself. But now with a play like *Country* it's operating critically upon a genre of plays. There's something of that, though less developed, in a play like *Through the Night*, where the play is aware of other television plays on hospital life. These plays still somehow operate within realist moulds. I find it very difficult to talk about. These are formal concerns but they are also integral concerns that anybody interested in creating a dramatic text simply has to have. You know this sort of consonance of character and epochal social force is not a thing that you sit down and draw up a table on: 'Is it him or him?' Basically Gethyn Price in *Comedians* represents more than just an individual character, he represents a particular class formation in Britain in the mid-'70s, he speaks to a particular constituency, talks to a particular aspiration, suggests a particular impatience. If that's not rooted in the real society then it's bullshit.

This is where writing against the media is so important. You're working against a known construct: the hospital drama, the bed-sit com, all of which are in the ultimate realm of fiction. The text is oppositional in that it opposes the procedures of that other work, so that you're always confronting an audience with something. That can be very abrasive and alienating. So I try to use socially known forms rather than try to

innovate forms beyond the audience's experience. For example, *Bill Brand* was a weekly hour-long TV series centred on the life of a male figure. People have expectations of how that will work: there's a story, there's a problematic which is either resolved or handed on. So people are not stretched to follow it in terms of its narrative structure or character development. That's important because what will be stretching them is the detail of the lives of the characters, what they're talking about. Because it's not about a private eye, but a left-wing socialist just out of the SWP with a girl friend still in it and a wife, kids, a fractured marriage, responsibilities, a left formation within the local party: the Labour Party as it was then constituted emblemized in character. That's a phenomenal amount of stuff to grapple with; it seems daft to ask people to follow you through some formal innovative stuff as well. Bill Brand was palpably not mad, but everything he stood for is represented as maniacal by the popular media.

In the normal TV series characters like that are the thing from the outside that comes in to provide a problem for that week's story and are then expelled at the end.

That's right.

*I wanted to ask you one more question about historical drama and historical characters that's of interest to me: when you're dealing with characters like the Reeds, they're not characters that most of us in the audience, whether we know their writings or reputations or not, have a particular visual fix on. But when you're dealing with characters like Lenin you're dealing with someone whose image is very familiar to us through photos, posters etc. When I saw *Reds* the moment Lenin came on the New York audience broke into applause, which was a very strange experience in a 45th Street and Broadway theatre. It reminded me of the criticisms made to Eisenstein after *October* in Novy Lef, that he had chosen a character who merely looked like Lenin. When you're dealing with characters of which we have a particular visual expectation, does that pose a different set of problems to characters who, however historical, don't exist as an image to us?*

What sort of difficulties do you imagine they might be? The visual fix you have on Lenin is solved by getting hold of an actor who looks a bit like him and using whatever means you have to enhance that.

I was just thinking of what you were saying earlier about taking account of an audience's expectations in order to work oppositionally. When you've got a character who already exists as an image, that's one expectation that exists in relation to that character in excess of all others.

Yes it is, but I don't think it's a major one. I don't quite understand that story of people applauding when Lenin came on: I suppose you have to say that they recognised him.

They recognised a certain resemblance.

That's wonderful because there were about six or eight scenes where Lenin figured quite prominently in the original draft screenplay. He doesn't have a single word to say in the final text of *Reds*. One of the reasons that was advanced for getting rid of Lenin was that audiences in the States would not know who he was. Now I'm powerless to argue that because I'm not American. I can ask Americans who say 'Lenin? Sure I know who he is.' But how many can you ask? So it's really heartening to know that Lenin was recognised, I'm thrilled that he was cheered.

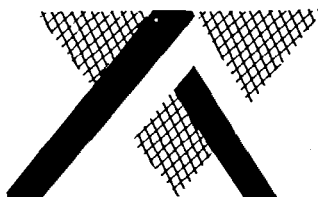
There was a recognition on that visual level which was matched by a mis-recognition on the level of the history of socialism in their own country, and that was peculiar.

But there's next to nothing in the second half of the movie that depicts a positive view of revolutionary politics. The extent to which the Russian Revolution after 1917 is represented solely by Zinoviev is really a terrible calumny. It collapses into Stalinism with no Stalin. It collapses back into the audience's expectations, which is totally unhistorical and indefensible.

1982

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MAKING LOVE AND REVOLUTION

71

EDWARD BUSCOMBE REVIEWS THE REVIEWS OF 'REDS'



The lovers reunited in *Reds*.

That Warren Beatty should have got the 'Best Director' award at this year's Oscar ceremonies was odd, since good direction, at least in the narrow sense, is not what most strikes one about *Reds*. But perhaps it was not entirely unpredictable. As everyone knows by now, the awards owe less to aesthetic merit and more to a combination of studio politics and Buggins' turn. Their lack of contact with real achievement, as opposed to mere 'success', is evidenced by the long list of truly great who never won one in open competition: Chaplin, Welles, Hitchcock, Cary Grant and so on. Clearly the best actor award was pre-empted for Henry Fonda (another great who had always somehow been overlooked) and very likely Hollywood knew enough about the chequered history of the script for *Reds* (as recounted in Mick Eaton's interview with Trevor Griffiths in this issue) to be leery about bestowing an accolade here. Since for reasons that still remain mysterious *Chariots of Fire* has

been singled out for best picture, only the director's award remained if Hollywood was to honour the major picture of one of its brightest stars and entrepreneurial talents.

Beatty's speech accepting the Oscar deserves recording. After naming the people at Paramount and Gulf and Western, its parent company, who had put up the money, he said: 'I want to say to you gentlemen that no matter how much we might like to have strangled each other from time to time, I think that your decision, taken in the great capitalist tower of Gulf and Western, to finance a 3½ hour romance which attempts to reveal for the first time just something of the beginnings of American socialism and American communism reflects credit not only on you, I think it reflects credit on Hollywood and the movie business wherever that is, and I think that it reflects more particular credit on the freedom of expression that we have here in our American society and the lack of censorship that we have

from the government and the people that put up the money.'

The emphasis which Beatty put upon the specifically American nature of his subject matter is interesting. Certainly when I went to see the film I had expected it to centre on the Russian Revolution. Partly out of ignorance of John Reed's earlier career, but mainly influenced by the way the film had been sold, I imagined a kind of cross between *Dr Zhivago* and *October* (if such a thing can be imagined). In fact *Reds* makes a great deal more sense seen not as an account of Russian experience but as essentially about the ways in which events in Russia affected the American politics of the period. Indeed, the film's basic structure, which is that of the bio-pic (a familiar enough Hollywood genre), seems on *prima facie* evidence better adapted to dramatising this American experience; not least perhaps because American socialism's failure to become a mass movement throws its personalities into sharper focus. Of course there is a view of the Russian Revolution which sees that event too as largely a matter of personalities: Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin... But if *Reds* had truly attempted to tell the story of the Revolution solely through the biography of a single man, and an outsider at that, it might have indeed been the fatuous historical romance some critics have accused it of being.

What is even more interesting about Beatty's speech is the contradiction he articulates between the subject matter of the film and the political beliefs of the people who financed it. This is hardly a novel insight, and it is easy enough to dismiss his remarks as an undignified attempt to ingratiate himself, to appear respectably dressed in what is after all the shop window of capitalism. But all the same there is a real contradiction here, one which we are all, even *Screen* in its very different way, in the business of exploiting. And those inclined to sneer might ask themselves whether, for instance, the version which the Russians are reported to be now making of the same book, *Ten Days That Shook The World*, will give any more space to Reed's account of Trotsky's place in the events than was accorded him in *October*, Eisenstein's earlier 'version' of the same work. Not that censorship through financial control is more defensible, but it's a leakier system.

But of course the Hollywood system doesn't depend only on direct ownership of the means of

production; there is the inherited weight of ideological orthodoxy too, and it's worth asking what price Beatty had to pay in return for the vast resources (reported as upwards of \$35 million) made available to him? Or to put the question more carefully, what appeal did the backers see the film as having for the huge popular audience they relied on to get their money back? Clearly there were two primary selling points: firstly, an historical epic about what is, from any political perspective, the greatest event of the twentieth century. And secondly, a love story. Some critics have seen the film as no more than another Hollywood romance with the Revolution as mere backdrop. Andrew Sarris, in a review in the *Village Voice* headed 'A man, a woman and, oh yes, a revolution', wrote: '*Reds* is more a love story than a revolutionary chronicle, and, as it happens, I prefer love stories to revolutionary chronicles.'

Others, by contrast, have seen the biographical elements as largely irrelevant to the politics. Thus Nigel Andrews in the *Financial Times*: '... in later reels the warm-up human wackiness goes into *rallentando* and we start to get the message-from-our-sponsor. Jack and Louise take turns to coldfoot across the snowy Russian tundras to see what Lenin, Trotsky and their chums are doing. And Lo! They pronounce it good. Three cheers, they urge us as the October Revolution resounds, for the overthrow of Fascism under the Czars. Three slightly uneasy cheers for the overthrow of provisional democracy under Kerensky (played by Oleg Kerensky). And three distinctly queasy cheers – no, on second thoughts, let's skate over it altogether – for the barbarism that ensued as Bolshevism tank-rolled on into history. Reed and his kind "saw the future and it worked." We have seen the past and it didn't.' (This, we may suspect, is the message from Mr Andrews's sponsor.)

Perhaps one answer to the question of what price has been paid is that no Hollywood film, certainly not one budgeted at this level, could be made which did not seek to represent historical events through the eyes of characters with whom the audience can form some emotional relationship. This is for Hollywood's audience what a film narrative should be. But it need not follow from this that historical events are thereby inevitably reduced to being explained by the

motivations, or comprehended through the consciousness, of individuals. The tradition of the novelistic can encompass more than that. The analysis of Victorian society which Dickens provides in *Bleak House* or *Our Mutual Friend* is by no means simply a function of the psychology of his characters.

That *Reds* is not just the story of the early years of communism told through the eyes of John Reed and Louise Bryant is in any case evident from the interviews with 'witnesses' which punctuate the film. The effect of the testimony of these aged commentators could be simply to secure the legitimacy of the fictional, or rather dramatic, parts of the film; their reality status is signalled by the black backdrops against which they are photographed in contradistinction to the pearly whites, chocolate browns and vivid reds in which the rest of the film is shot. But the interviews can more plausibly be read as a device for denying that fixed point of truth, that all-seeing, all-knowing consciousness located in the space which the narrator of the fiction usually occupies and into which we, the audience, are invited. If, as has frequently been argued, this is the crucial strategy of the classic realist text, then *Reds* is not one, since it seems to offer us instead a multi-layered discourse in which each view is presented only to be countered by another. Was Reed merely a playboy who ran to revolution as an escape from his own psycho-sexual problems, as Henry Miller claims? Or a dangerous agitator, or a true hero of American socialism? Or all these things in some ultimately indecipherable mixture? Instead of the certainties of realism we appear to have the flux and contradiction of a modernist text. If this is so then *Reds* is not a sell-out to the bio-pic view of history.

But the witnesses can be, and have been, read in a quite different way. Far from this clash of conflicting viewpoints being an index of modernism, several critics have read the device as signifying the ultimate unknowability of historical reality. Instead of the contradictions between the witnesses, and between them and the dramatic presentation of Reed and Bryant, producing a new dynamic knowledge, they are read as proof that we can never be sure of anything, and instead of the certainties of the realist narrator we have the other side of the coin, the weary despair of washed-up bourgeois liberalism sunk into a slough of relativism. Thus for Philip French in the *Observer*, the witnesses

are 'a twilight chorus reminding us of the untrustworthiness of memories, the deceptions of history and our own mortality'. 'Who knows what happened in history', muses Alan Brien in the *Sunday Times*, 'on-the-spot reports like John Reed, who wrote *Ten Days That Shook The World*, and his wife Louise Bryant, or the weathered groggy survivors who give their testimony today?' David Thomson, writing in *Film Comment*, adds his own particular note of philosophical resignation: 'The witnesses dispute one another, and they often undercut the romance and assertions of the movie drama. But they honor human frailty and vagary. They show us history as time's peeling of every mind and emotion. . . . This is mankind in the toils of the past, committed to historical awareness but unable to master it.'

The fact that some critics want to read the film in this way does not of course mean that the documentary sequences necessarily recuperate *Reds* for a bankrupt disillusion with the possibilities of historical knowledge. But the film does tread a thin line between presenting history as essentially a construction, something made not found, and history as a confused jumble of conflicting voices in which any attempt to decipher a structure will always be undercut by yet another view. The tension between the two positions, it has to be confessed, is often a productive one; indeed there is a case for saying that *Reds* is the most complex and intelligent film not just about the Russian Revolution but about History that Hollywood has yet given us. Unfortunately, there is another contrast which damagingly handicaps the position which *Reds* ultimately appears to take up on socialism.

The contemporaries of Reed who are interviewed are all, obviously, extremely old. Reed himself as portrayed in the film by Warren Beatty is extremely young. In a literal sense it could not be otherwise. The events shown took place over sixty years ago; Reed himself died at the age of 33. But the contrast runs deeper than this. The witnesses for the most part take a very distanced view of events. Few, though there are one or two exceptions, seem to feel passionately any more about the cataclysms of 1917. Reed, on the other hand, is carried along throughout the film on a wave of boyish enthusiasm. The film tries hard at points to suggest an intimation of the way things were to turn out. Zinoviev is brought in to voice some all too plausible but

sinister apologies for *realpolitik*, and towards the end Reed finds that his speech to the Eastern People's Congress is being twisted to suit the requirements of the Party. But in each case his response is that slightly comical and engaging bewilderment which is one of Warren Beatty's screen trademarks. The film clearly wants to register a politically mature and honest view of the Revolution. But neither the historical persona of Reed, as evidence in *Ten Days*, nor the persona of Beatty as actor can possibly encompass this. The danger, then, which the film does not wholly avoid, is of making the desire for revolution itself appear merely a charming but impossible dream of youth, bringing irresistibly to mind the lines of that other disillusioned romantic:

*Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
And to be young was very heaven.*

This problem, of how both to be faithful to the perceived spirit of an era (which *was* full of youthful idealism, else how could the revolution have been achieved?) and yet at the same time to incorporate the perspectives which hindsight must inevitably bring, must beset any historical film. The past is, after all, different; another country. But what is the point of recreating the past unless it be to produce some meaning for the present? It is in any case impossible to see it other than with the eyes of the present; not in the sense that we do not perceive a difference, but in the sense that that difference is marked against our awareness of our present. That is what makes it past; yet the people who lived in that past could not possibly register its difference as a contrast with our future. What *Reds* suffers from is the lack of any discourse which can carry meaning which is neither naive enthusiasm nor tired memory but instead a resilient, still positive commitment. The only characters in the drama who carry a weight in any way equivalent to Reed and Bryant are Emma Goldman, who concludes that the revolution could never have worked in America, and Eugene O'Neill, whose savage cynicism receives no answer from Louise Bryant.

It is the character of Bryant who shoulders the burden of that other political scene of the film, sexual politics. Here again there is a problem with how to represent the past as past yet also as having relevance to the present. Some critics

have argued that the role is fundamentally misconceived, that Bryant is shown as a proto-feminist in an age which predates feminist consciousness. This may be no more than an ignorant slur on the feminists of that period, yet clearly there is something unsatisfactory about both the role and its playing. As the relationship with Reed develops it is hard not to become increasingly irritated with her desperate attempts to drag him back to domesticity, her threats that if he goes off to the revolution one more time she might not be there when he gets back. In part this is the fault of how domesticity is represented: the embarrassingly unfunny and even more embarrassingly chauvinist scene of Reed making a mess of cooking dinner, and the cloying winsomeness of the little dog which symbolises a happy home. Still more it is the fault of Diane Keaton, whose kooky mannerisms are ill-suited to the portrayal of a woman of such intellectual distinction and independent mind. Acting is an area of cinema that has not been overmuch theorised, but it is clear from *Reds* just how much of the meaning of a film is carried by the personalities of the performers. Beatty and Keaton are simply too lightweight to shoulder the burden placed upon them, and in consequence the powerful playing of Jack Nicholson as O'Neill wins an easy victory over the causes which Reed and Bryant represent.

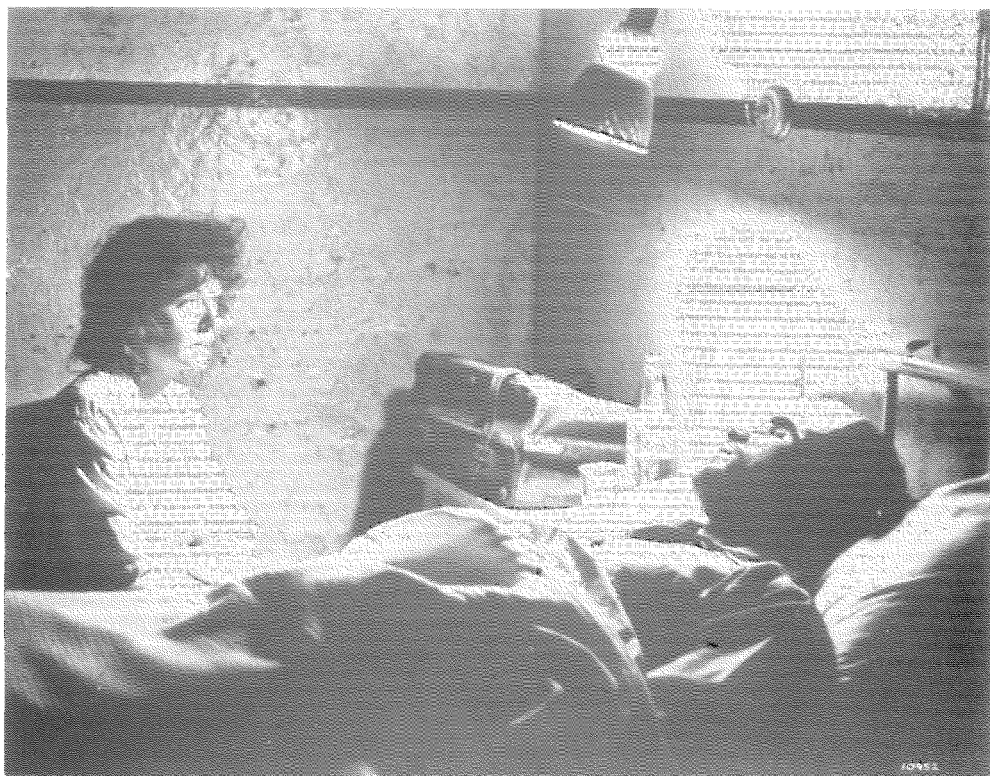
But there is a structural as well as an acting problem. Bryant is, whatever the inflections given by Keaton's performance, shown as a woman who is firm in her desire for a relationship of equals. She wants Jack Reed, but only on the terms that she pursues her own career and is not simply his hanger-on. 'What as?' she insistently demands of him when he invites her to come with him to New York. The problem is not that she is a feminist before her time, but that he isn't. Reed, in fact, as presented in the film appears to have virtually no consciousness of her dilemma, intellectually committed to free love and revolution yet wanting emotional commitment and a stable existence too. His desire is simply to be where the action is; she becomes increasingly no more than a nuisance, and his final acceptance of her comes only when he is forced to, as his nursemaid.

To have made Reed aware of the nature of Bryant's problem, to have made him a character conscious that the claims of the personal and the

political cannot be reconciled simply at the expense of the female member of the partnership, might indeed have been inappropriate to the era of 1917, would have made him in fact not so much contemporary to the 1980s as futuristic. But this is precisely to see the difficulty as solvable only within the terms of the psychological drama when there is always the possibility, admittedly difficult within the norms of Hollywood narrative, of a perspective from elsewhere. Yet for all this it has to be said that one of the most daring things about *Reds* is that it manages at times to suggest that the relationship between the political and the personal is not, finally, a question of either/or but of the interpenetration of the two, and Trevor Griffiths's interest in this theme is one of the things that makes him such an important dramatist. It undoubtedly says something about the state of film reviewing in this country that one of our most intelligent critics, Philip French, can reduce this to a sneering phrase about 'Griffiths's conviction that only good revolutionaries enjoy full sexual potency.' One of the strengths of *Reds* is that it never reduces the

political to the personal (Henry Miller's theories about Reed's character are never taken up). It gives full weight to each even if they are not equally distributed between the two protagonists. All the more pity then that the problem of the personal is only ever seen as Bryant's problem, that not only Reed himself but the film too locates the dimension of the personal exclusively within the female discourse.

But perhaps this is not entirely fair. There is a scene in the middle of the film in which Reed and Bryant reconstitute their passion. The sequences of love-making are intercut with shots of the Revolution in full spate as the Internationale blares on the soundtrack. It dices dangerously with parody, but the risk is worth taking. Not so much because the film is making the obvious if perfectly acceptable point that making love and revolution are compatible, but because it's one of the few points in the film where Reed and Bryant's lives, both political and personal, are truly shared. But then men have never had a problem with sexual passion. It's what comes before and after that seems to cause the difficulty.



THE ACADEMY AND THE INDUSTRY

GILLIAN SKIRROW REFLECTS ON THE MARCH CONFERENCE OF THE BRITISH UNIVERSITIES FILM COUNCIL

At Warwick University, where teaching about film first gained academic respectability in Britain, gathered representatives of the three uses of media in education: media as instrument of education, represented by producers working in university Audio-Visual Units—the usual constituency of BUFC conferences; media as object of education, represented by teachers of film/television/media theory—mainly from Warwick, London and Scotland; and media as vocational training, represented most clearly by the National Film School. The presence of all three groups in one place is itself remarkable since each is concerned with a different activity and operates with a different philosophy.

The Audio-Visual Units were set up in universities in the 1960s as an aid to science teaching (with its emphasis on observation—making the truth visible/making the visible the truth) and as an aid to a more 'scientific' way of teaching, with a particular emphasis on cost-effectiveness. For example, the recording of a science experiment offers the advantages of repeatability, close-ups of details which would otherwise be difficult for a whole class to view, and a guarantee that the experiment will be seen to be successful. Underpinning this work is Shannon's Information Theory which is concerned with measuring information and finding the most efficient means and forms of transmitting it; but as many of the producers recruited to the Audio-Visual Units came from

broadcasting (often documentary or current affairs departments) there is also a set of production values associated with the forms in which information is presented. An Audio-Visual Unit has a privileged relationship to knowledge within its institution for, unlike an academic department where a consideration of the structuring of the knowledge field is an important part of the department's work, a service unit's claims to be simply reproducing and transmitting knowledge and information are above question and investigation.

Media theory teaching, which is always based in an academic department, has a very different approach to knowledge—which needs no explanation to the readership of *Screen*—but it is an approach which often seems threatening to media professionals. Since this work is concerned with the construction of meaning in and by audio-visual texts and their audiences, one area of interest is exactly the part that beliefs in 'observation' and broadcasting production values play in the construction of meaning—and because such beliefs and values are implicated in ideologies of capitalism, racism, sexism, etc, this sector has to a large extent defined itself in opposition to them. Unfortunately, some theorists sometimes feel it necessary to valorize, or at least defend, any product of oppositional practices such as the avant-garde and independent cinema—some of which are boring and pretentious by any standard—which gives

those working in the media an excuse to dismiss theorists as simply having bad judgement.

The third group, those involved in teaching film and television as vocational training, have up to now worked in separate institutions from the other two. Although a very small group themselves, they have two sub-divisions: one is represented by the National Film School and the London International Film School, which prepare people for work in feature films, television and allied industries, and guarantee them a union ticket when they get a job; the other comprises institutions with university status such as the Royal College of Art and the Slade School of Art, which provide post-graduate students with the space, equipment and intellectual stimulation to work with film (and to a lesser extent, television) in any way they wish. Their students often choose to work in the independent sector rather than the broadcasting and film industries. Several polytechnics as well as smaller art schools are now also, significantly, moving into the area of vocational training which has traditionally only been undertaken by specialist institutions partly as a way of regulating the supply of media workers for whom there was little demand.

It is then not only philosophy but also geography and history that have kept these groups apart. Since they have had no opportunity to engage with each other the question of whether they had any reason to do so has never been raised. But reasons are beginning to appear. What made the meeting at Warwick possible, and possibly productive, was a certain blurriness which has appeared recently at the edges of what used to be the three distinctive areas. Many Audio-Visual Units invested in lightweight colour video equipment just before the cuts in Higher Education and at the dawn of the video 'revolution'. These units are now under pressure from within their institutions to pay for themselves by outside work, and from individuals and companies in the locality to provide training, or at least play, with the latest electronic toys. But a semi-commercial commitment puts strains on an Audio-Visual Unit's relationship with academic departments within the university and on relationships between the educational and freelance sectors of the film and television unions. Meanwhile, some theoretical film courses which not so long ago

looked dangerously modern, are now, because of their lack of attention to television and absence of practical work, open to being regarded as passé. So perhaps the avoidance of open conflict between practitioners and theorists at the conference (apart from a small skirmish after the showing of two avant-garde films) indicates not that they are just tired of hostilities, but that in spite of a difference in philosophies they are beginning to see each other as potential allies.

The newest academic course due to start in October 1982 is a collaborative one between the Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde and will have a practical and increasingly vocational element, using the audio-visual facilities at Strathclyde. The course, in Film and Television Studies, is to Joint Honours degree level and comes under the auspices of the Drama Department in Glasgow University and the English Department in Strathclyde. The history of the introduction of this course in Strathclyde University is symptomatic of the schizophrenic relationship between media theory and practice in Higher Education. In 1976 theory and practice were combined, if not united, in an academic unit which also contained the University's adviser on educational methods. The theory element was a one-year course in Communication and this had a special relationship to the practical facilities, which include a colour video studio and editing suite, a 16mm film unit, and graphics. But in order to develop the one-year Communication course to a degree in Film and Television Studies, the teacher of theory had to move to an established department which had a professor. At the same time the production unit lost its academic status, reverting to being a service, and the adviser on educational methods became autonomous. Each of these is now governed through a different committee and cannot relate to or challenge the others on the same ground. The University did, however, see the usefulness of a practical and vocational element being included in the proposals for the Film and Television Studies course, which, when it seemed to promise jobs for arts graduates had a very rapid progress through the committees, eventually gaining approval for a start in October 1982, even though this will mean late admissions.

Perhaps the announcement during the past winter that Britain will have two satellite

78 channels by 1986 may have produced a helpful climate; on the other hand the single most important factor in the success of the proposals was the coming to Strathclyde of a professor committed to Film and Television Studies. So it is too early to say whether anything is implied for the future of Film and Television Studies and their relations with Audio-Visual Units by the introduction of this kind of vocational course at this time. The fact that undergraduate Film and Television courses generally have escaped the

worst of the cuts has probably no connection with the fact that communications is one of Britain's few growth industries. But the relationship between film and television as academic study and as industry is worth watching. The current investment by the Government in new communications technology could at least be used strategically to defend postgraduate courses under threat, such as those at the RCA and the Slade.

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ELECTRIC SHADOWS IN ITALY

79

JOHN ELLIS SURVEYS A RETROSPECTIVE OF CHINESE CINEMA



A gesture of heroic defiance in *The Storm* (1959).

The 150 Chinese feature films shown during Turin's recent special event 'Ombre Electtriche'¹ confirmed impressions gained from the far smaller seasons at the National Film Theatre in 1976 and 1980². Turin's comprehensive historical survey was organised from Chinese and other archival sources principally through the persistent work of Marco Müller. Chinese fiction cinema has developed a distinctive form of entertainment, reconciling the conflicting demands of socialist realism with the seemingly antagonistic form of melodrama. It is a cinema preoccupied with social questions in a way that is quite alien to Western fiction. Many of the films show exemplary figures and events that typify social contradictions and processes: they conform to a socialist realist aesthetic rather than one of verisimilitude and individual psychology. The development of the scenario is therefore the most

time consuming and delicate stage, and sometimes films are over-literal transcriptions of their scenarios. Those films that have a real emotional power, the ones that provoked me to cry almost despite myself, are those which draw upon the melodramatic traditions of heroic

¹ Ombre Electtriche, organised by the Regione Piemonte Assessorato alla Cultura, Turin, February 25-March 8 1982.

² See Rosalind Delmar and Mark Nash, 'Breaking with Old Ideas: Recent Chinese Films', *Screen*, vol 17 no 4, pp 67-84, for a description of the films of the Cultural Revolution period shown in 1976. See Scott Meek and Tony Rayns, *Electric Shadows: 45 Years of Chinese Cinema* (BFI Dossier 3), London, British Film Institute, 1980, for extensive annotations of the 1980 season. The British Film Institute now distributes *Street Angel*, *Crows and Sparrows*, *The Spring River Flows East* and *Two Stage Sisters*.

suffering and sacrifice that were developed in the 1930s and early '40s.

China's cinema of the pre-Liberation period was a profoundly colonised one. Shanghai was the chief centre both of production and of exhibition, and Shanghai was a city divided into various foreign 'concessions'. The earliest extant Chinese film, *String of Pearls* (1925), with both Chinese and English intertitles, vividly demonstrates what this implies. It recasts a short story of Maupassant's into a tale of a thoroughly Westernised Chinese couple who sacrifice their all to replace a borrowed necklace that had been stolen from them. Maupassant's ironic twist (the stolen pearls were artificial) is replaced by the unmasking of the thief and the restitution of the couple's lifestyle and reputation. Stylistically, the film resembles a British film of the period (that is, based on superseded American models). The family life shown is also curiously British: husband in suit with pipe clenched between his teeth, wife at home arranging flowers, a suburban villa of the type still to be seen in Shanghai, a thousand miles from where it ought to be. One strange note is struck, however. For no narrative reason in a household full of servants, the husband stays at home to look after the baby (incompetently) while his wife goes to the fatal party.

Films like *Strings of Pearls* were happily not the only type of production in pre-Liberation China. Production for the domestic rather than international audience drew upon Hollywood genres, principally melodrama, and turned them to Chinese themes: the suffering hopelessness of the mass of people, the heroic actions of which they are capable, their powerlessness in the face of the arbitrary actions of both political and natural forces. A politically committed production developed in Shanghai in the '30s involving itself in running battles with Chiang Kai-Shek's censors. This movement produced acknowledged classics like *Street Angel* (*Malu Tianshi*, director Yuan Muzhi 1937) and *Spring River Flows East* (*Yi Jiang Chun Shui Xiang Dong Liu* d. Cai Chusheng & Zheng Junli 1947), both of which operate within this melodramatic tradition.

The left film workers also produced two silent films with non-synchronised sound which indicate rather different possibilities. *Spring Silkworms* (*Chuncan* d. Cheng Bugao 1933) attempts a detailed portrayal of peasant life,

basing itself on a story by Mao Dun. The actual processes of silkworm farming are detailed as closely and lovingly as in an instructional film, with the perilous economic status of the peasant family linked first to the investment needed to feed the silkworms and then only subsequently to the collapse of the silk market. The painstaking nature of the images and of the acting is made even more obvious by the soundtrack, which seems to consist of selections from light opera played on a fairground organ. *The Highway* (*Da Lu* d. Sun Yu 1934) has an extravagant enough ending (workers foil the collaborationists only to be gunned down as they work by a passing Japanese fighter-plane), but its attitude to sexuality is strikingly at odds with post-Liberation representations. In particular, one scene shows the workers bathing naked in the river, unashamedly watched by the two female protagonists. Eventually they decide to emerge from the water, at which point there seems to be a shot missing from the print screened. In another scene, the two women kiss and caress each other as they discuss which of the men in particular they love.

Film-makers of all persuasions were capable of intelligent transpositions of Hollywood models by the period immediately before Liberation. *The Irrepressible Light of Spring* (*Guanbuzhu De Chunguang* d. Wang Weiyi & Xu Tao 1948) borrows extensively from Hitchcock and that sector of *film noir* that deals with the husband-as-mystery (*Suspicion* 1941, *Notorious* 1946 etc.). Zhao Dan, the staple star of left-wing films and later perhaps the pre-eminent star of Chinese cinema, is cast here as a villain. His final act is to lead a bunch of heavies to wreck the 'model agricultural enterprise' where his wife has sought refuge. The film's view of the sterility of fashionable pre-liberation Shanghai is devastating, making all the more artificial the 'sophisticated' comedy of lies and misunderstandings that is *Long Live the Wife* (*Taitu Wansui* d. Sang Hu 1947).

Post-Liberation Chinese cinema adds the tenets of socialist realism to this already heady mixture. A very clear narrative pattern emerges in the early '50s which adapts some aspects of existing cinematic and novelistic models, and rejects others. A large number of films take a historical panorama or an exemplary historical incident and treat it according to the following pattern: the initial wretchedness and oppression

of workers and/or peasants is detailed, a misery that is increasing. The workers heroically defy their oppressors; some are murdered. Their relatives swear revenge in a potent outburst of anger, but are restrained by their friends: revenge is a collective rather than individual matter. The workers organise, with or without the help of an intellectual, depending whether intellectuals enjoy political favour at the time of the film's production. Collective action ensues, which can result in success or failure.

Such a narrative model encompasses both the panoramic story of one young woman's political education at the hands of various male party members in *Song of Youth* (*Qingchun Zhi Ge* d. Cui Wei & Chen Huaiai 1959); the espionage version of *Red Detachment of Women* (*Hongse Niangzijun* d. Xie Jin 1960); and two stories of industrial disputes: *Land Aflame* (*Liaoyuan* d. Zhang Junxiang & Gu Eryi 1962) where the miners are victorious and the intellectual is one leader amongst several, and *The Storm* (*Fengbao* d. Jin Shan 1959) where the strike on the Beijing-Hankou railway is crushed but the alliance between intellectual and worker is firmly established. This narrative model is one of great emotional power, able to produce tears of sympathy, anger and pathos in turn. It has startling similarities with the kinds of narrative model that operate in Hong Kong's commercial swordplay films³, particularly in the way that the intellectual (or heroic worker) is constructed as the catalyst of collective action. The repeated and explicit turning of revenge from a personal to a general concern can be seen as a rejection of the intensely personalised vengeance that dominates the swordplay film. Both kinds of film operate on a similar emotional register and basic narrative pattern, but with very different aims and effects.

Conceptions of socialist realism, gained initially from the USSR, have formed this distinctive narrative pattern. Films made immediately after Liberation show directors and scenarists coming to grips with the new demands of a cinema produced for the construction of a new society (rather than in and against the old), exploring this aesthetic's practical political limitations. *This Whole Life of Mine* (*Wo Zhe*

Yibeize d. Shi Hui 1950) takes an interesting and atypical figure, one who does not seem to occur again: a policeman for the KMT regime, who is only in the police force because it provides a relatively secure income. His life, narrated in flashback, shows his solid ordinary sense of truth and justice being repeatedly affronted, until he can stomach no more. He ends up as a beggar starving to death in the street. Although the final shot is of his son as a member of the victorious revolutionary army, the protagonist's powerlessness was extensively criticised later in the '50s. It is a powerlessness integral to the particular realist conception of the film, one of taking a marginal figure whose dilemmas merely exemplify the social contradictions of pre-Liberation China. *Gate Number Six* (*Liu Hao Men* d. Lü Ban 1952) tends to displace the centre of dramatic attention from the workers in a transport yard to their increasingly desperate employer. After winning a profit-sharing agreement, the negotiating team announce their victory to the massed workers outside: the camera, however, rests on the face of the traumatised feudal employer, motionless and alone. Both films seem to be experimenting with the margins of possibility in the new aesthetic that has opened up for China's cinema.

The mainstream of the aesthetic has remained in rather safer areas, producing bio-pics of exemplary characters like *Nie Er* (d. Zheng Junli 1959), which requires Zhao Dan to play a composer 25 years his junior, or the infinitely respectful *Li Siguang* (d. Ling Zifeng 1979), which includes a depiction of England almost as hilarious as many Western depictions of China. However, the course of the mainstream Chinese film aesthetic has never been a smooth one: the Chinese film industry, with the massive investment of social capital that it involves, is always very responsive to changes in political lines prevailing in the People's Republic. The depiction of intellectuals in films is one example of this responsiveness, as is the often heated debate that takes place around particular films. Films are attacked for a variety of reasons, but usually the director is not held chiefly responsible: more often it is the scenarist or the author of the original novel or play. One exception is Lü Ban, whose 50 minute satire *The Arrival of the New Director* (*Xin Juzhang Daolai Zhi Quian* 1955) seems to have led to his demise. The new director of a factory arrives

³ See Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, 'Hong Kong/China 1981' in *Screen*, vol 22 no 4, pp 91-100.

while the deputy director is still making frantic arrangements to cater for someone he assumes will be as corrupt as the previous director and himself. The new director, however, is an honest man with a sense of humour, willing to let the spectacle of bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption continue for four reels until he reveals himself to the forces of corruption.

Lü Ban's film is one product of the brief period between 1956 and 1958 when 'a hundred flowers' were allowed to bloom, giving a degree of intellectual freedom that had not seemed desirable in the previous years of reconstruction. It also allowed films to appear whose emphasis was upon the accurate reconstruction of a historical period rather than on the vision of an exemplary reality. One such film is the story of the Chinese herbal doctor *Li Shizhen* (d. Shen Fu 1956), set in the sixteenth century, showing one man's heroic mission to correct the whole body of Chinese pharmacological knowledge. The brief period of the Hundred Flowers seems to have clearly demonstrated the tension inherent in the notion of Socialist Realism. On the one hand there is a demand for an accurate depiction of real social conditions, and on the other an often conflicting demand for an exemplary view of what can happen. Tony Rayns and Scott Meek see this tension implicit in a film as early as *Dragon Beard Ditch* (*Longxu Gou* d. Xian Qun 1952) with its rigid distinction between life before and after Liberation. This tension haunts the films which are being made today, under a similar if more cautious policy of relative freedom for intellectuals. The Chinese socialist realist aesthetic that produces this tension has only been abandoned during one political phase of the People's Republic, that of the Cultural Revolution.

Two films directed by Xie Jin provided new examples of the aesthetics of the Cultural Revolution period. *On the Docks* (*Haigang* co-directed by Xie Tielu 1972) is a revolutionary opera so far removed from any conception of realism that it is almost entirely shot inside Shanghai Studios, despite having the docks in question just down the road. The result is a dazzling display of primary colours, idealised sets, and elaborate song and dance routines based on work practices. A simple tale of sabotage is abandoned after 90 minutes for an extended song sequence (of about twenty minutes) in one set, in which a wavering worker is convinced of his

revolutionary duty. Pure cinematic pleasure lies alongside pure revolutionary rhetoric. Xie Jin's *Youth* (*Qingchun* 1977) is a narrative fiction in a revolutionary romanticist register: its basic story concerns a deaf and dumb peasant girl who dreams of becoming a telecommunicaitons officer with the military, and the heroic doctor who cures her. This was the last film of the Cultural Revolution, from Shanghai, the last citadel of the Gang of Four. It was never released in China.

Films made since the Cultural Revolution have embarked on perhaps the most difficult ideological enterprise yet undertaken in China. Still beset by the conflicting demands of Socialist Realism, they attempt to come to terms with China's difficult history since the late 1950s. One feature that becomes very clear is that the standard of living of film characters (especially city dwellers) is not intended as an accurate depiction of life: rather it proposes a level to which the film's audiences should aspire. In this sense, the films are not realist in any way that the term is understood in the West. However the scope of their subjects outstrips anything that Western realism routinely attempts. Several of the most recent films shown attempt a reassessment of China's history since the anti-Rightist movement of the late '50s, posing it as a series of mistakes that can now be corrected. *Evening Rain on Ba Mountains* (*Bashun Yeyu* d. Wu Yonggang & Wu Yigong 1980) throws together a group of socially typical characters in a river boat during the early years of the Cultural Revolution. The conversations that occur are distinctly implausible, but the aim is not to recreate a difficult period of history: it is rather to present an analysis of the differing political positions adopted. These range from the hard-line 'heartless' Red Guard woman to a paranoid old man who hides at first sign of trouble. The narrative can find no satisfactory solution however. Having changed the young Red Guard's politics by force of example and tears, the narrative concludes with a weak romanticism permitting the central figure, a poet, to escape into the hills with his little daughter.

Xie Jin's *The Legend of Mount Tianyun* (*Tianyunshan Chuanqi* 1981) is far more successful, taking a broader historical perspective and a stronger central conception. A melodrama structured around female choice, it's a sophisticated remake of *Two Stage Sisters* (*Wutai Jiemei* 1965). Song Wei and Feng Qinglan are in

love with the same man, Luo Qun, a dashing young Communist who has visionary plans for developing the natural resources of the Tianyun area. When his enemies take advantage of the anti-Rightist movement to disgrace him, the women are faced with a choice. The loyal Party member Song Wei breaks with him for the sake of the Party; Feng Qinglan marries him and supports him. The right choice is represented as having been the 'wrong' choice. Twenty years later Song Wei hears of the couple again, still in disgrace, and fights her husband, one of Luo Qun's principal enemies, to rehabilitate him. The film has a complex flash-back narration which presents criticisms of every major political policy in China since 1957. It marks a new level of sophistication in Chinese cinema, despite a few technical tricks and flashy shots which seem

to have come from the more witless end of New Hollywood (e.g. de Palma) via Taiwan. It reworks the central melodramatic tendency of Chinese cinema so that the sufferings of the central characters are caused by tendencies within the Party itself rather than by the oppressors of the pre-Revolutionary period.

The *Legend of Mount Tianyun* may mark a break with the predominant rhetoric of the last 30 years. Certainly this rhetoric seems to be a little threadbare in some films: *The Stars Are Bright Tonight* (Jinye Xiangguang Canlan d. Xie Tieli 1980) shows a new officer able to recognise his subalterns simply by their clichéd appearances (intellectual with glasses, etc.). But Xie Jin's film is still profoundly within the fine tradition of socialist realist melodrama that China has developed for itself.

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v

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AUTHORS AND GENRES

TWO RECENT RE-ASSESSMENTS ARE CONSIDERED BY STEVE NEALE

Much of Stephen Jenkins' introduction to *Fritz Lang* is spent discussing the ways in which Lang's films have themselves been discussed by various critics working within various critical traditions. He points out the extent to which those traditions have produced not only differing readings of the films, but also differing understandings of the contours of Lang's filmography, differing selections of films within it for serious attention. From within the parameters of establishment film journalism in England, Jenkins cites a series of statements from the pages of the 'quality' press and from the BFI's *Monthly Film Bulletin* and *Sight and Sound* which are all too exemplary of what he himself terms its 'common sense'. These range from Nigel Andrews' obituary description of most of Lang's American films as 'superior hack pieces' to the following comments on individual titles, all from the *Monthly Film Bulletin*: 'thriller construction on a one dimensional level' (*Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*); 'Fritz Lang seems to have lost most of his old power to sustain dramatic tension' (*The Big Heat*); 'It is difficult to accept beyond the evidence of the credits that this ... was directed by Fritz Lang' (*The Blue Gardenia*). Rick Altman, meanwhile, simply opens his introduction to the BFI Reader on the musical with the statement that 'If Hollywood measured

its success by the quality of criticism inspired by its films, then the musical would certainly have been its worst investment.' (Altman might, like Jenkins, have gone on to distinguish between Anglo-American criticism and some of the work of *Positif* and, most notably, *Cahiers du Cinéma* – Jean Domarchi's articles on Minnelli for example).

Predictably enough, the response of the British film journalists reviewing these books has been paradigmatic. They've ignored Jenkins' book completely while subjecting *The Musical* to unashamedly philistine abuse. The purpose of this review is not to engage, yet again, in dissecting the components of the cultural tradition which produce this response (Jenkins himself does that well enough). It is worth remarking, however, on one aspect of continuity in the tradition (from its response to *Cahiers* auteurism in the '60s to its response to Altman's book in the '80s) which has fed into a current conjuncture in British film culture whose components include attacks on film theory by Brownlow, Durnat, Anderson et al, consequent attacks on SEFT, the BFI Education Department and the development of film education in general, and, spilling over into the hallowed ground of English Literature, the 'MacCabe affair' at Cambridge.

This common component, variously expressed, is a (racist) fear of contamination by 'French' ideas, ideas which are misunderstood (wittingly or unwittingly), but whose common mark is specified, in Clancy Sigal's review of *The Musical* in the *Guardian* (26.11.81) as a 'sheer disrespect for the English language' and whose common function is a contamination of 'English' (in all its senses) in general.¹ Its ideological basis is stated with pristine clarity by Richard Roud in his article, 'The French Line', published in the Autumn 1960 edition of *Sight and Sound* and quoted in Jenkins' book. In seeking to come to terms with *Cahiers'* strange taste in movies, Roud in passing explains to us that 'what we in England like to think of as great cinema' is 'a fusion of significant form with literary or humanistic content'. By 'literary' is meant the writing enshrined in what Williams, quoting Cambridge Professor Christopher Ricks, has called 'the canon of English literature'. By 'humanistic content' is meant the common sense values of English liberalism. Flashing forward some twenty odd years we find these self-same elements and values enshrined in the discourse of Brownlow, Durnat, Anderson and the reviewers of Altman's book.

The appearance of these two books, in addition to providing the opportunity to discuss Lang and the musical specifically, also provide an opportunity to assess and re-assess the concepts of authorship and genre, both central to much of the film education denigrated by the *anciens philosophes* of British film culture. The question of authorship is, indeed, the major focus of Jenkins' book, in addition to a lengthy and detailed analysis of the place and function of women in Lang's films.

Like many of the film courses currently structured not just around the concept of 'authorship' but also, usually, around the films of a particular director, Jenkins' position on authorship and Lang is in some ways a contradictory one. Criticising traditional auteurism for the ways in which it inscribes and prescribes coherence and unity (thus sealing over the gap, for instance, between the films Lang directed in Germany and the films he directed in America), Jenkins is concerned to stress differences, divisions and heterogeneities, together with the shifting but tenacious hold of auteurism itself:

*the obvious must be stressed: auteurism cannot account definitively for the Lang-text since this goal is impossible. The text is created anew with every reading of it. The problem is not 'Lang' but auteurism itself. Auteurism is not simply a critical movement, one of a series, that can be located historically, and that has been succeeded by an interest in semiotics, structuralism, psychoanalysis, etc; rather it is a concept which shifts and changes but in which film culture's investment at all levels remains constant. Retrospectives of directors' work, books on directors, still proliferate, some marked by an awareness of developments in film theory, some not, but all marked by the names of Ophuls, Dreyer, Aldrich, Lang, etc.*²

Here, however, is the crux of the contradiction, for Jenkins' book is itself precisely such an instance, marked by the name of Lang:

*'Lang' here is a space where a multiplicity of discourses intersect, an unstable, shifting configuration of discourses produced by the interaction of a specific group of films (Lang's filmography) with particular, historically and socially locatable ways of reading/viewing those films. I hope this collection of writings will begin to trace some sort of useful path through that space.*³

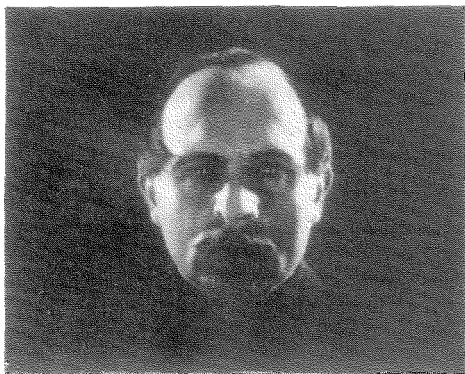
Jenkins' book succeeds very well in tracing that path, in demonstrating the multiplicity of the discourses that have interacted with Lang's films to produce the readings he cites and includes. Moreover, it usefully challenges the core of so many of those readings (the thematics of destiny and fate) by demonstrating the ways in which they function within traditionally auteurist discourses as a means of ascribing a unity to Lang's films and by tracing instead a series of varied but repetitious structures and strategies around female characters, the female image and the theme of the look. Hence,

with Lang the woman is rarely unproblematic as object. What tends to happen is that the very idea of the female is dealt with by various forms of

¹ See Raymond Williams' analysis of the 'Cambridge controversy' in 'Crisis in English Studies', *New Left Review* 129, September-October 1981, especially pp 53-4.

² Stephen Jenkins (ed), *Fritz Lang*, London, British Film Institute, 1981, pp 6-7.

³ *ibid* p 8.



The controlling male gaze: Haighi (left) in *Spione* and Haskell in *Rancho Notorious*.

*displacement. Woman becomes a memory from outside the space of the text which haunts the male central character.*⁴

Where traditionally, thematically-oriented auteurist readings have treated the series of marks and tokens that cross Lang's films as somehow symbolic of the theme of fate, Jenkins argues instead that

*they are examples of displacement of the female through substitution. Some objects are not directly interchangeable with a female character, but nevertheless function as emblems of a certain crucial disturbance within the narrative which is always traceable back to the idea of the female.*⁵

Elsewhere, Jenkins points to the extent to which the look is both stressed and repressed within Lang's films, while emphasising the extent to which its representation within the space of the texts themselves is subject to variation and displacement, most evidently in the disappearance of the tyrant figure in the passage from Germany to the United States. These figures, Haighi in *Spione*, Doctor Mabuse, simultaneously 'aspire to the point of enunciation' and, hence, are marked as the subjects of a controlling, hypnotic gaze. Their 'American counterparts', Jenkins argues, lack both this aspiration and such a gaze. (I would contend that this gaze does not simply disappear; nor is it totally repressed, sublimated into the scopophilic

relations established between the text and its spectators on the one hand and the camera, spectator and female body on the other. Its trace erupts intermittently in the obsessed and obsessive gaze of characters like Joe Wilson in *Fury*, Eddie Taylor in *You Only Live Once*, Stephen Byrne in *House by the River*, Vern Haskell in *Rancho Notorious* and Dave Bannon in *The Big Heat*. In each instance its appearance is precisely a mark of these characters' aspirations to power and control—over the lives and deaths of other characters—in active defiance of the Law.)

Jenkins' intervention is, as he says, into the space constituted by Lang's filmography. Insofar as this is the case, it does not itself ultimately displace that 'investment' in authorship to which his introduction is addressed. Hence the contradiction (of which Jenkins is obviously well aware). This is not by any means to argue that the kind of intervention Jenkins has made is without political value. On the contrary, so long as authorship maintains its cultural grip, interventions of the kind represented by Jenkins' book (and others in the BFI's series, notably Paul Willemsen's books on Pasolini and Ophüls, Ian Christie's on Powell and Pressburger, Mark Nash's on Dreyer and Don Ranvaud's dossier on Rossellini) are both politically important and strategically useful. It is clear, moreover, from Jenkins' work (and from other books cited above) that certain filmographies (including Lang's) constitute sites of resistance to auteurism in its traditional forms. The politics of auteurism depend, therefore, to a considerable extent upon calculations as to which filmographies function in this way, though this is by no means to argue

⁴ *ibid* p 40.

⁵ *ibid* p 53.

that different ways and means of classifying and reading films, based clearly on a political theory of representation and discourse, need not be sought.

One traditional alternative employs the concept of genre. Hence I turn to Rick Altman's book on the musical, a genre to which, as Altman himself strongly argues, relatively little serious attention has been paid either within the critical tradition that encompasses early *Cahiers* and *Movie* or within more recent work on film and film theory. Altman's book addresses itself, through his own introductions to the essays and extracts included within it, to the latter in particular, arguing both that the importance of the sound track in the musical necessitates a shift away from an exclusive attention to the scopic and the visual, and that the musical as a textual form poses serious questions to any theory that views the discursive paradigm of the classical Hollywood movie in terms of 'transparent' narration:

*the musical refuses to be contained by the traditional terminology and concepts of classical narrative analysis. Where the typical Hollywood example of classical narrative emphasizes dialogue, the image track and transparent presentation of the diegesis, the musical regularly privileges dance or song, subordinates the image to the soundtrack, and foregrounds the process of producing the diegesis.*⁶

Similarly, in an introduction to Bellour's piece on narrative segmentation and symmetry in *Gigi*:

*Bellour treats Gigi as a transparent example of classical narrative, while I am convinced that the musical regularly undermines the conventions of classical narrative on which its narrative portions are so heavily dependent.*⁷

Yet the contributors to this collection are careful not to treat what they see as a foregrounding or undermining of the conventions of classical narration as a mark of 'deconstruction' or 'subversion'. It is rather a mark of the genre's 'complexity'. In his introduction, Altman writes that

*It is ironic that the most escapist of the entertainment arts should also be the most reflexive, the most aware of its status, and thus the most complex of all the Hollywood genres.*⁸

And Jane Feuer stresses that 'The MGM musical... uses reflexivity to perpetuate rather than to deconstruct the codes of the genre.'⁹ I'm not sure, though, that in setting out to challenge what he sees as a recently prevalent view of classical Hollywood cinema, and in thus opening a political space for a contemporary re-assessment of the musical, Altman, in particular, is not in fact constructing an over-monolithic view of current film theory, while at the same time cutting himself off from elements within it that would enable him to analyse and to assess the precise significance of the non-transparent 'reflexivity' to which he refers.

For instance, in his 1976 article 'Narrative Space', Stephen Heath, concerned to challenge any simplistic view that narrative cinema is or was 'transparent', writes as follows:

*It is too readily assumed that the operation – the determination, the effect, the pleasure – of classical cinema lies in the attempt at an invisibility of process, the intended transparency of a kind of absolute 'realism' from which all signs of production have been effaced. The actual case is much more complex and subtle, and much more telling. Classical cinema does not efface the signs of production, it contains them... what counts is as much the representation as the represented, is as much the production as the product.*¹⁰

Heath goes on from here to introduce the importance of genre as a means of providing variation on the balance of representation and the represented, variations in the address of process of the production of meaning which precisely allow, indeed demand, certain forms of 'excess' (certain forms of 'complexity', one might say). In passing, he refers to the musical:

The process of film is then perfectly available to certain terms of excess... 'Style' is one area of such controlled excess, as again, more powerfully, are

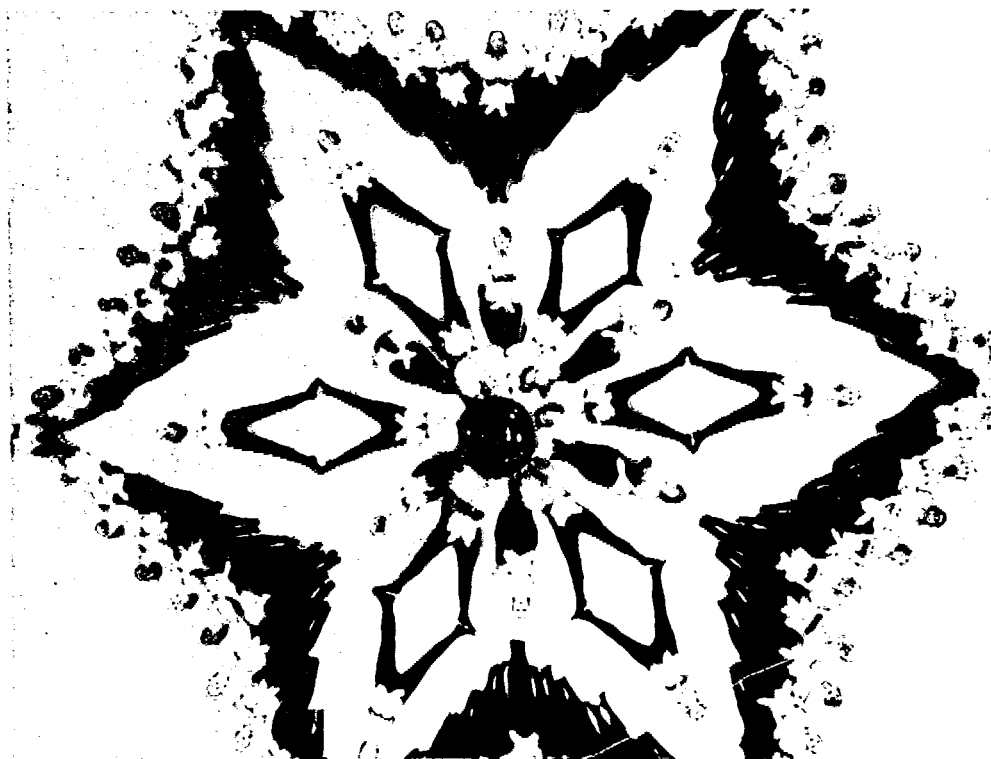
⁶ Rick Altman (ed) *Genre: The Musical*, London, British Film Institute and Routledge Kegan Paul, 1981, pp 57-58.

⁷ *ibid* p 102-103.

⁸ *ibid* p 7.

⁹ *ibid* p 173.

¹⁰ Stephen Heath, 'Narrative Space', *Screen*, Autumn 1976, vol 17 no 3, p 97.



The female body as an element of decor – Busby Berkeley's *Dames*.

genres in their specific versions of process. *The musical is an obvious and extreme example with its systematic 'freedom' of space – crane choreography – and its shifting balances of narrative and spectacle.*¹¹

Finally he stresses that the instance of the musical 'should not be allowed to mask the fundamental importance of the experience of process in other genres and in the basic order of classical cinema on which the various genres are grounded.'¹² It is from this perspective that the particularities of the musical need to be addressed, not from one which sees the musical as working differently than other genres.

None of which is to deny either that, as Jim Collins' piece argues, there is marked and particular 'recognition' of the position of the viewer in the musical; or that, as Alan Williams argues, the musical tends in its musical numbers

to 'a departure from diegetic realism', inscribing in the process a constant fluctuation between diegetic and non-diegetic material across the relations established between the sound and image tracks (though that depends on one's definitions of 'diegetic' and 'realism'). It is to argue, however, that the specificities of the musical need to be discussed in the context of other genres, as an instance of genre, and not as a special case.

A number of contributions to Altman's book, notably those of Lucy Fischer and Dennis Giles, are concerned to address issues of sexuality, gender and the representation of women in the musical. Fischer focuses particularly on the Busby Berkeley films, while Giles is concerned with *The Bandwagon*. Here one can see a continuity of concern between this collection and Jenkins' book on Lang, a continuity which may offer a way of classifying, analysing and reading films on another basis than genre, or, more importantly given its hold, authorship. Such an alternative would enable and demand, not only an address to images of women and femininity,

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *ibid.*

but also to images of masculinity, and to representation, language and narrative as means by which they are articulated, perpetuated and subject to contradiction and occasional interruption. Within this context films could, for instance, be grouped together or differentiated on the basis of the ways in which their narratives inscribe and resolve a set of Oedipal relations and conflicts, or the ways in which they inscribe representations of the human body across the instances of display, sublimation and repression. The display of the human figure (both male and female) in the musical could be contrasted with the treatment of the body in Lang:

Expressionless faces, like the body dismembered by close-ups, like the body as an element of decor, like the substitution of objects for human figures, like the human figures who are crucial in their absence; all these factors can be read as textual symptoms of

*a certain disavowal of, a reticence over, mainstream narrative cinema's massive investment in the pleasureable gaze at the human figure.*¹³ 89

Further analysis could examine, for example, the extent to which the display of the male body in mainstream cinema is dependent upon a specific discursive recognition of the spectator (cf Collins and others in *The Musical*) in contrast to the types of disavowal associated in Lang's films with a displacement of 'the idea of the female'.

But whether or not these particular questions are pursued, it is important to stress that they (along with the other issues discussed here) are made possible by work like Jenkins' and Altman's, rather than by the critical and cultural tradition of their reviewers.

¹³ Jenkins, op cit, p 60.

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'TAKING' PICTURES

PHOTO-TEXTS BY BARBARA KRUGER

Barbara Kruger is an American artist working in New York. Her work, reproduced for the first time in this country, operates in a manner reminiscent of billboards and advertisements. Text is combined with image to produce a declarative 'message'. The montage of cropped quotations from (usually) examples of now outmoded styles of art photography with short assaultive phrases constructs parodic advertisements exposing aspects of ideology. Though instantaneous in their impact, these messages are problematized through the indeterminacy of the personal pronouns and the ambiguity of the address. Below, a statement from Barbara Kruger about this work:

There can be said to exist today a kind of oppositional situation in the arts (principally on a theoretical level only, as the marketplace tends to customize all breeds of activity); the laboratorial or studio versus certain productive or more clearly, reproductive procedures. As parody frees ceremony from ritual, so its 'making alike' allows for a disengaged (or supposedly) distanced reading.

This strategy is employed by a number of artists working today. Their production, contextualized within the art subculture, frequently consists of an appropriation or 'taking' of a picture, the value of which might already be safely esconced within the

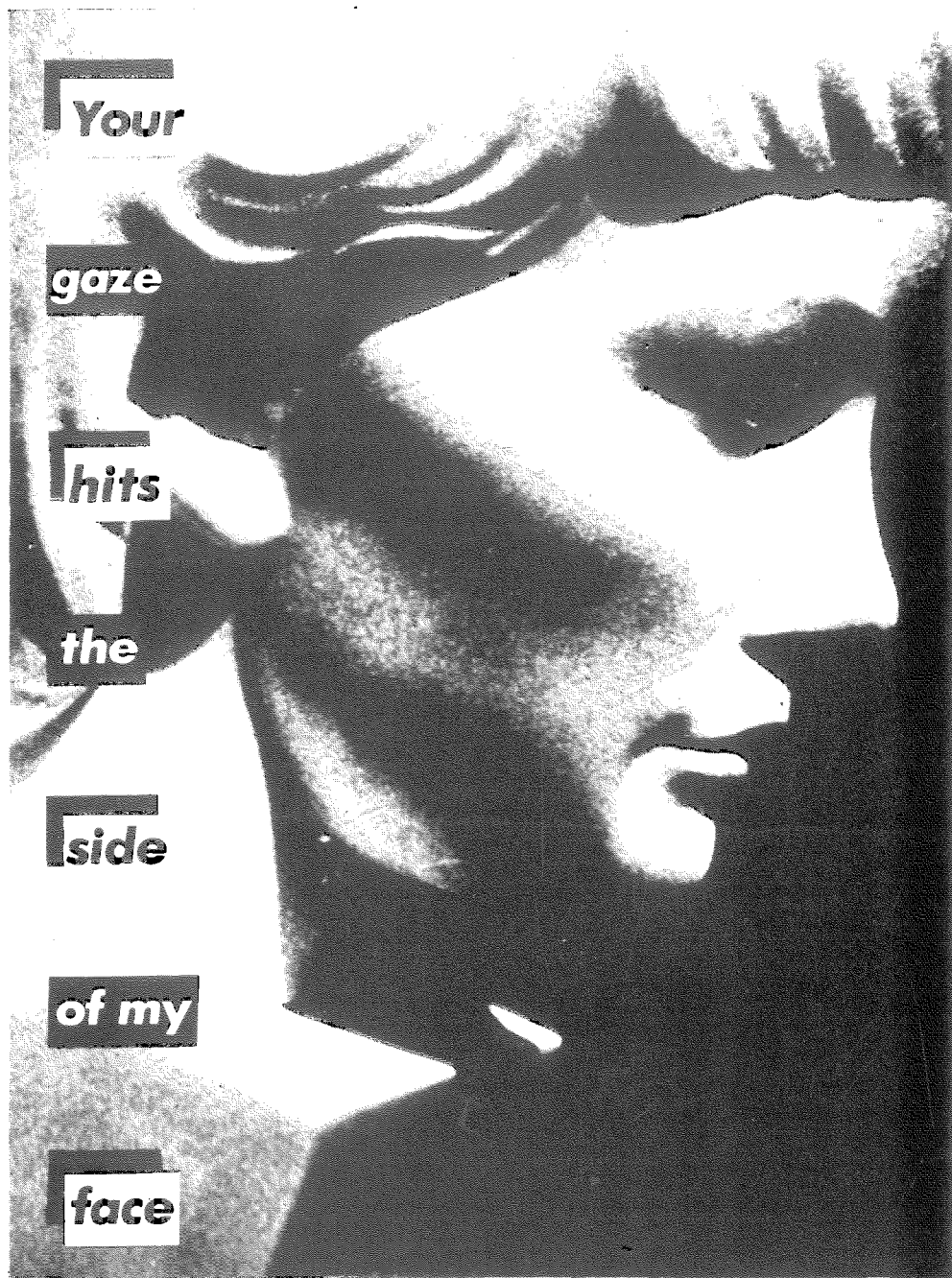
proven marketability of media imagery. Using, and or informed by fashion and journalistic photography, advertising, film, television, and even other artworks (photos, painting and sculpture), their quotations suggest a consideration of a work's 'original' use and exchange values, thus straining the appearance of naturalism. Their alterations might consist of cropping, reposing, captioning, and redoing, and proceed to question ideas of competence, originality, authorship and property.

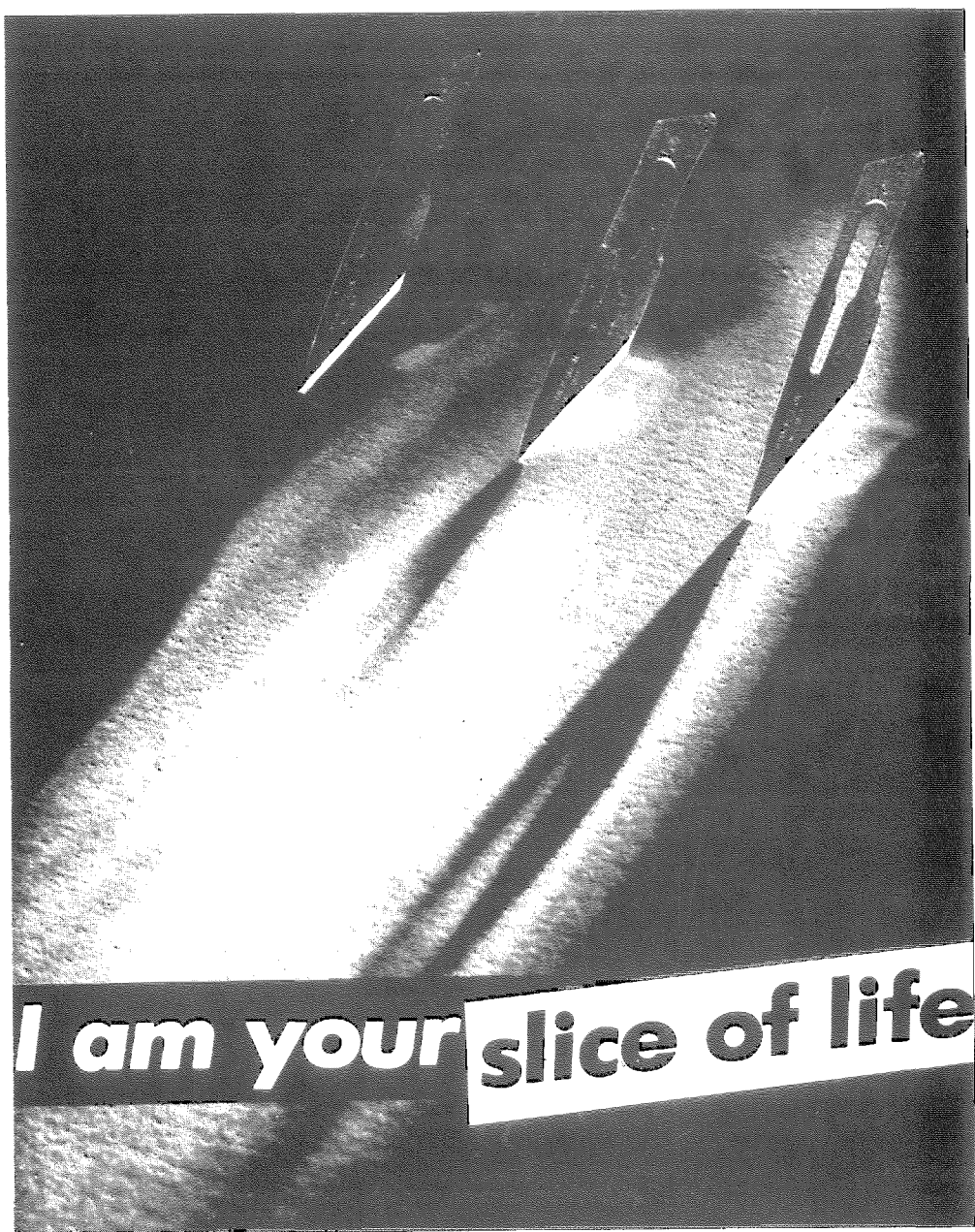
On a parodic level, this work can pose a deviation from the repetition of stereotype, contradicting the surety of our initial readings. However, the implicit critique within the work might easily be subsumed by the power granted its 'original' thus serving to further elevate cliché. This might prove interesting in the use of repetition as a deconstructive device, but this elevation of cliché might merely shift the ornamental to the religious. And as an adoration the work can read as either another buzz in the image repertoire of popular culture or as simply a kitschy divinity. However, the negativity of this work, located in its humour, can merely serve to congratulate its viewers on their contemptuous acuity. Perhaps the problem is one of implicitness, that what is needed is, again, an alternation, not only called 'from primary to secondary', but from implicit to explicit, from inference to declaration.

Your assignment is to divide and



conquer







***You reenact the
dance of
insertion and
wounding***



